

# NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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NEWSLETTER FOR  
BIRDWATCHERS

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THE YEAR OF DROUGHT

A. Navarro, S.J.

1973 will go down in the history as the Year of Drought. We all know and have witnessed the sad effects and consequences that the country had to undergo as the monsoon failed.

The ill effects of the year's drought have been felt both by man and by bird, and I do not think the birds could fare better. In my ramblings through the forests and the countryside, I made it a point to observe the behaviour of the birds under these strenuous conditions.

We have to bear in mind the fact that birds are highly sensitive to sudden changes in weather; but this was a slow and lengthy change of circumstance in the case under study. Birds like human beings have to rely upon their daily nourishment for their existence; though the birds were wandering about here and there in search of food, yet they have a better chance as they can easily fly to a nearby ground exploring food supplies. Since the areas affected by the drought were fairly large, many birds in their quest for food may have met with total failure, which means sure death.

There are quite a number of animals which can do without nourishment for long periods, but birds on account of their fast metabolism, cannot long subsist without nourishment. It is well known that in certain critical circumstance the extre-

mes of weather have been responsible for a high bird mortality.

Birds may be deprived of their nourishment for more than one reason. Drought may be one of the reasons for lack of food. At other times there may be large quantities of food available, but as birds they may not be able to have access to it because it is covered by heavy snowfall; it may also happen that food may have been damaged due to disease or insect pest. In like manner, any form of scarcity for a time, may be responsible for the heavy toll of birdlife. All my observations have been restricted to those areas which I have frequented at all seasons in previous years.

At the end of the 1972 monsoon season, due to deficiency of humidity in the soil, the vegetation was fast decaying, and slowly a grieved picture was presenting itself. The greenery faded, bushes and shrubs were fast shedding their half dry leaves. Large open patches of land and fields were almost devoid of any greenery. Birds were shifting from place to place in search of food and shelter. The first birds which must have felt the effects of the drought must have been the insectivorous birds, which, I found, were greatly reduced in numbers. These were the swallows, swifts and martins. In like manner the Flycatchers were hard to locate even in the most secluded parts of the forest. Tickell's Blue Flycatcher could not be seen until the middle of June. The Small Minivets were never located anywhere around. A few Rosy Pastors and Greyheaded Mynas could be seen here and there but only for a very short period.

December and February are the best months around Bombay, Pune, Nasik, and Belgaum; the weather is well balanced and most suited for bird activities. This is the time when large flocks of Short-toed Larks and Pipits are seen in open areas or dry fields on the outskirts of Pune. But this year, the flocks were reduced to a small number; besides, the birds stayed on for a short time only. In like manner, all along the Bombay-Pune road, the Blue Jays were reduced to a mere sprinkling of specimens seen at long intervals.

From the beginning of April until the middle of June the bird population of the areas already mentioned was depressingly low and pitiable; the common ground birds: larks, pipits, stone plovers, quails and chats were rarely seen on their customary grounds. Most birds had congregated into the forest areas, mainly along the streams, where here and there a few shallow pools were still maintained.

The forest vegetation was kept pretty well even at this time of the year, except for some patches where the low vegetation was almost dried up, and besides the trees and shrubs bearing wild fruits did not bring forth their annual crop; rather the crop did not ripen in time to satisfy the hungry birdlife. The most common trees and bushes in the Khandala region which are a source of food for wild birds are: the banyan and mango and the jak, and among bushes carvanda and lantana including several



varieties of wild figs and wild olives. Due to the drought, most fruits never fully ripened and grew to their standard size. The figs especially used to harden, remaining attached to the trunk and rendering themselves useless for bird consumption.

This scarcity of food must have had a great effect on the annual cycle of the birds. From March to May is the pick of the breeding season for most Indian birds. However, it is a matter of surprise to observe that a few birds were seen carrying building material or food for their young. I still wonder under these circumstances how many birds failed in their final goal of rearing offspring. Experience tells us that under normal conditions at this time of the year there are always children around the villages displaying and offering for a mere pittance all sorts of chicks. Indeed this was not the case this year; this could be further evidence that only a very few birds were successful in their breeding activities.

Another effect of the drought was the prevalence of a death-like silence throughout the forest, though the forest singing birds were there. The shama, the orioles, and bulbuls and tree pies including the drongo could be heard but their songs were brief and soft and at times rather plaintive and far below their usual high standards. The long, loud duetings of the Green Barbets never lasted more than forty or fifty seconds.

The noisy hammering of the coppersmith was a mere low echo of its high-pitched monotonous calls. The hornbills never went beyond a couple of cackling noises. The nightjars kept so silent that for some time I doubted their presence. As I was very keen in tape-recording their calls, I requested some of my friends to lend a helping hand; their replies seemed to corroborate my observations that only after a long interval, a few calls would be uttered and these too never lasted more than 20 or 30 seconds at a stretch. Neither did I see or hear the plaintive calls of the Green Pigeon, but in the middle of June a few Spotted Doves were seen at the entrance to the forest.

Four thrushes were breeding in Khandala: two are permanent and two are migrants; they are the Blackcapped Blackbird and Tickell's Thrush. These came as usual by the middle of May and for a time kept on moving in small flocks and therefore their movements could be easily observed. At the end of May none of the migrants could be seen in Khandala. It is evident that their disappearance was mainly due to lack of food.

The permanent residents are the Whitethroated Ground Thrush and the Whistling Thrush. Both these thrushes were seen in their usual grounds. However, this year I did not have the chance and pleasure of hearing their superb and elaborated songs - truly, they are amongst the best songsters in Khandala.

In our garden, by the middle of May, a few flowers were in full bloom - thanks to the care taken by the mali. What I missed were the Yellowbacked Sunbirds and the Purple Sunbirds. Year after year, these have come to drink the nectar and at



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the same time to relieve the flowers of hordes of minute insects. This year's unusual absence of the sunbirds may be a further indication that there being so few wild flowers around, the sunbirds have explored other grounds for their supply of nectar.

Apparently a few varieties - the Slatyheaded Scimitar Babbler, the Spotted Babbler, the Quaker Babbler and the Magpie Robin despite the prevalence of drought-ridden circumstances - were carrying on their life activities as usual. In like manner the Ioras and Tailorbirds could be heard with their monotonous calls, but these were below their customary high pitch and length.

### SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE BIRDS OF THE GREAT RANN OF KUTCH

Ishwar Prakash

I got an opportunity of visiting the Great Rann of Kutch during the last week of November 1972. From Gandhidham to Bhuj, there was nothing spectacular in respect of the bird fauna which was more or less similar to that occurring in the Rajasthan desert. But no sooner our vehicles moved north of Bhuj, the gradually dwindling numbers of babblers and doves became apparent. In as much as that 20 km after Bhuj and 10 km short of Moribet, no babbler or dove came in our view. There was a conspicuous absence of birds like sparrows, chats, buntings, finch-larks, bulbuls, etc., which are commonly seen in the desert of Rajasthan while travelling by road. However, a small group of Common Sandgrouse (Pterocles exustus) and a few Grey Partridge (Francolinus pondicerianus), Bonelli's Eagle (Hieraaetus fasciatus) were observed. We reached Moribet late in the afternoon. This place is dominated by hillocks and Euphorbia caducifolia bushes. The northern plateau overlooks the Great Rann of Kutch. Trees like Acacia senegal, Salvadora oleoides, Prosopis cineraria, P. juliflora and Acacia jacquemontii are quite common on the foothills of Kaladoongar. In the Euphorbia thickets on the slopes of the hill, a fair abundance of Grey Partridge was noticed. I was told by a local shikari about the presence of a coloured partridge in the vicinity. It may be the painted partridge, F. pictus. The population of other birds appeared to be very disappointing in the surroundings. A few Pycnonotus cafer and P. leucogenys, a flock of 30-40 House Crows, a few Jungle Babblers, Strickland's Chat (Oenanthe picata), house sparrows, Whitewinged Tits (Parus nuchalis) were occasionally seen. A group of Bengal Vultures and Neophron were observed feeding on the carcass in the salty Rann. During the next three days we saw one each of the Shikra, Accipiter badius, and a Short-toed Eagle (Aquila rapax). The absence of bee-eaters was strongly felt.

Before taking the readers actually into the Great Rann, I would like to explain that the great marshy plain can be divided into two distinct and typical subhabitats: the rann and the bet. The rann is a vast saline plain, extending up to the horizon. In this subhabitat although the soil moisture was available only at 5-20 cm yet there were no grasses or trees growing in it, probably due to the high salinity. We did not witness any bird in this habitat in the Rann which was dry at that time. A bet is a small, sometimes extending in several square kilometres, elevated patches, where due to leaching of salt by rain water, grass growth was very good. In some of the bets natural tree growth was also observed but in most of them the trees appeared to have been planted. The bets were found to be excellent habitat for the Gerbils, Meriones hurrianus, Tatera indica and Gerbillus gleadowi. A fair abundance of these rodents was noticed.

We traversed the Great Rann in the northwest and northeastern directions and up to the northern border where it gradually merges into the sand dunes of the Thar desert. During our first traverse, we saw a Kestrel hovering over our jeep near a bet. A few jungle babblers were seen hopping in the bets and feeding on termites which occurred there in great abundance. A single Crested Lark, Galerida cristata was also seen. As we passed the northern sand dune country, suddenly and to our great joy we were amidst birds - a lot of them. The Green Bee-eater, Merops orientalis was the first to greet us after a very dusty journey. Sparrows, babblers, doves, crows, two ravens and some pigeons were seen. A little deeper in the sand dunes Blackbreasted Larks were very common. The well-vegetated sand dunes were flourishing with birdlife and we forgot for a moment that we were coming from a birdless zone of the Rann.

During the next two days of wanderings in the Rann we encountered two Crested Larks, one shikra and a wagtail (species?). On a bet in the northern portion of the Rann we saw a magnificent Houbara, Chlamydotis undulata. I was quite surprised, however, to observe a real absence of raptors over the bets where rodent population was quite appreciable!

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Our third traverse from Suigam in the northwestern direction. The eastern Rann exhibited larger bets and with very good herbaceous cover. Salinity conditions in this part were not so bad as they were observed in the central and western portions of the Rann. In this region we visited three large bets during two days. Birds were observed as under: Stickland's Chat, Crested Larks, common pigeons, house sparrows, partridges, shikra, short-toed eagle, house crows, and a raven. The bee-eaters were absent from this side of the Rann as well. One of the bets was inhabited by a lonely wild ass.



The striking impression of the visit to the Great Rann of Kutch is that the vast marshy habitat is a sort of birdless zone. It was only in the bays that some birds were observed.

#### RANDOM NOTES FROM BANGALORE

Zafar Futehally

On Christmas Day I wandered for a couple of hours around Palace Orchards in Bangalore to see the birdlife of the area. Ever since we came here on the 5th November I have been wanting to have a good look at the Large Green Barbets whose calls are heard from everywhere in the city, but whose protective coloration make them invisible. This morning I achieved my aim. A pair on a glomerata fig tree, was having a wonderful time eating berries, and from time to time beaked each other affectionately. They did not call at all during the half hour or so that I watched them. On the same tree was a Purple Sunbird in eclipse plumage with the long dark line running down the throat. A long 'kissing' call drew my attention to a Large Cuckoo-Shrike which landed on a peepal, though I could not see it afterwards. A pair of pariah kites floated and twisted effortlessly in the air, and I recalled Sir Landsborough Thomson's remark that kites look much larger than they actually are because of the manner in which they hold their wings. These birds had quite prominent underwing patches so perhaps they belonged to the migrant race. Common Swallows were pursuing their aerial prey, but what delighted me was a pair of Wiretailed Swallows on a telegraph wire. In the bright light the snow-white fronts of these birds and the other glistening colours of brown and steel blue are a fine combination.

Bangalore abounds with two exotic species of trees: Cassia siamia and Eucalyptus longicornis. Both these are favoured by White-eyes. The sight of groups of these birds communicating sweetly with one another sibilantly (if that is the word), hanging upside down, and stretching out into the fluffy white flowers of the eucalyptus is a sight from which one cannot tear oneself away. White-eyes are in my view the pleasantest denizens of Bangalore.

Another group of birds which has rather excited me are the White Wagtails. Every evening 150 birds come to a maidan near the Sankey Tank to have a bath. They bathe by turns, a dozen at a time. I put up a hide and have taken some pictures which will be reproduced in the Letter of the Month which the World Wildlife Fund intends bringing out from Bangalore. I will gladly send copies to anyone interested.

## • BIRDWATCHING IN BANGKOK

Prof. Dinesh Mohan

During my recent trip to Bangkok (November 1973) I had the pleasure of going out birdwatching with Dr Boonsong Lekagull, the well-known ornithologist and nature conservationist of Thailand. We went down south to the mouth of river Chao Phraya, crossed the river by a fast motorboat with long shafted outboard motor, so common in Thailand, and proceeded towards the sea by a canal, on either banks of which were coconut plantations and fishermen's huts. Families living in these huts made their earnings by catching shrimps, crabs and fishes and it was an interesting sight to see women wading through chest deep water with large nets to catch sea animals. The crabs and the shrimps are caught from the marshy fields on either sides of the canal and it was also an interesting sight to watch these creatures crawling all over the fields.

Coming back to birdwatching, we saw two types of kingfishers - white collared and black-capped - sitting on trees on either side of the canal and waiting for the prey. The white collared is known for its fondness for crabs. Flying overhead we saw brownheaded gulls, brahminy kite, gullbilled tern, little egrets and jungle crow. Walking through the fields, we came across Kentish Plover, golden plover, fantail flycatcher, green shank, red shank, pond heron, marsh sandpiper and the common myna.

I was told that the familiar Indian house crow is missing from the Thai scene. Neither do they have the brahminy myna.

Dr Boonsong has done extremely valuable work on birds of Thailand and he was busy writing his second book on birds. He is a very keen bird photographer and he showed keen interest in coming over to India and doing some Indian birds and animal photography both in still and movie. I am sure there will be a suitable opportunity for him to come over sometimes in the near future.

## NOTES AND COMMENTS

The Editor wishes the members of the Birdwatchers' Club of India a Very Happy and Prosperous New Year, and hopes to have their continued support in 1974.

## CORRESPONDENCE

Whitebellied Sea Eagles of Karwar

With a view to watch the Whitebellied Sea Eagles (Haliaeetus leucogaster) on the Karwar Lighthouse island during my recent holidays, I wrote to a friend in Karwar, North Kanara investigating the prospect. The idea finally fizzled out, but the formality involved in so doing may help intending birdwatcher visitors to the place.

Wrote back my friend: "As far as I am aware Karwar Lighthouse island is now out of bounds being declared a protected area after the last Pakistan skirmish. If you have any designs in that direction better come with o.k.s from the Light House people at Bombay. Local officials dont take responsibility. We used to go there for picnics in the old days; havent heard of any one being there on a jaunt for years now. These eagles are pugnacious and dont welcome intruders. A friend of mine once came with hissons and a transparent plastic kite with a brown-white eagle painted on it. In the air it looked like an eagle flying. In no time, four Whitebellied Sea Eagles landed up and attacked the kite. I have the torn kite as a memento."

R. S. Dharmakumarsinhji and K. S. Lavkumar who studied these eagles on the island in early 1950s may be interested in the pugnacious behaviour of these eagles referred to by my friend, and tell the readers of the Newsletter some of their experience.

J. S. Serrao

MINUTES OF THE XIIIITH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BIRDWATCHERS'  
FIELD CLUB OF INDIA

The XIIIth Annual General Meeting of the Club was held on Sunday, the 23rd December 1973 at 32A Barfiwala Marg, Andheri, Bombay at 4.30 p.m.

Dr Salim Ali was elected Chairman of the meeting.

The minutes of the XIIth Annual General Meeting held on 23rd December 1972 were read and approved.

The Acting Honorary Secretary gave an account of the membership and financial position of the Club. It was stated that the Newsletter was being sent to some 332 persons of which about 180 members had paid their subscriptions. Rs 2013.42 had been received as subscriptions and donations up to 20th December 1973. The Newsletter continued to be greatly dependent on Dynacraft Machine Co. Prvt. Ltd. for financial aid.



The Acting Honorary Secretary read a draft of a circular to be sent to members whose subscriptions for 1973 had not been received or recorded. Approval was accorded by the members present for sending such a circular. It was also decided by the members that the despatch of Newsletter should be discontinued after due notice, to those who had not paid for several years.

Mr T. V. Jose undertook to pursue the project of getting the readers at the British Council Library to take notice of our Club.

Br A. Navarro, S.J. said he would try and get a list of schools who would be interested in our activities.

Dr Salim Ali undertook to write individually to members of our Editorial Board to enthruse greater activity in their respective regions.

Dr Salim Ali suggested that notes and resumes from other journals

1. should be published in our Newsletter to show what other people were doing elsewhere in the world;

2. articles for the Newsletter should be compiled well in advance to be commented on in an interesting manner. The commentary should be published along with the article.

The appointment of Mr S. V. Nilakanta as Honorary Secretary and Editor was officially ratified by the members. It was decided that Mrs Leelavati Nilakanta should continue as Honorary Treasurer, the bank account being in the name of Mrs L. Nilakanta & Mr Zafar Futehally.

Mr Zafar Futehally's name should be published in the list under Editorial Board. (Owing to lack of time the names of office bearers will not appear on the cover of the Newsletter for January 1974.

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# NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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A SUCCESSFUL HUNT

Debashis Ray.

It was a cold and windy day. The wind had cleared large patches of water amongst the floating duckweeds on the jheel near my home. Its normally calm surface had clouded over with the incessant drizzle.

A dark kite like bird came flying low over the jheel. It was dark brown with a rounded tail and the head wore a buff coloured crown. Its cheeks were lighter, almost whitish and from shoulder to shoulder there were white spots and patches on the leading edges of the wings. A marsh harrier (Circus.a. aeruginosus) out for prey.

The harrier flew slowly and heavily into the north wind, constantly scanning the floating weeds. Occasionally it would glide lower and dangle its slender yellow feet. Then after sailing across the jheel the bird would turn and glide - slide back again.

The normal occupants of this jheel are a party of moorhens (Gallinula chloropus) but they, friends of the fair weather had long since taken refuge in the water hyacinths. A few fidgety spotted sandpipers (Tringa glareola) nervously changed their feeding stations, fluttering low with dangling feet and pointed wings. Only a solitary dabchick (Podiceps ruficollis) confident in its ability to outdive the killer overhead, paddled on the open water.



The harrier quartered for over ten minutes before settling on the edge of the marsh. There it sipped, ruffled its feathers, yawned and sat looking around. A little later it took off and resumed its quartering.

The harrier had been sailing in this fashion for a few minutes when suddenly a sharp "Keank!" brought my attention down to the water below. There, not a metre away from the floating vegetation were a pair of very ruffled and very agitated adult moorhens. Between them and the weeds were a couple of small fluffy black balls — chicks in down.

One parent tried frantically to chivy the chicks into the weeds. Each time the harrier came low it dived in fright only to come up immediately to protect its chicks. The other swam agitatedly nearby. The harrier dawdled and the moorhen succeeded in hiding one chick. The other it chased into another patch of weed, then dived again.

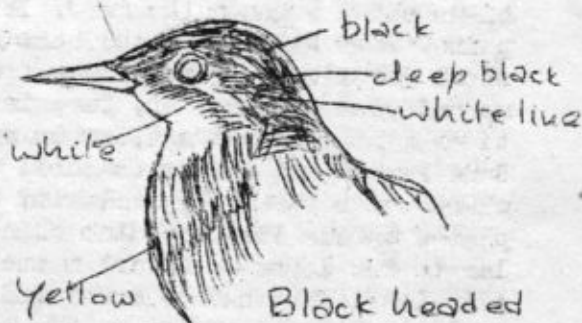
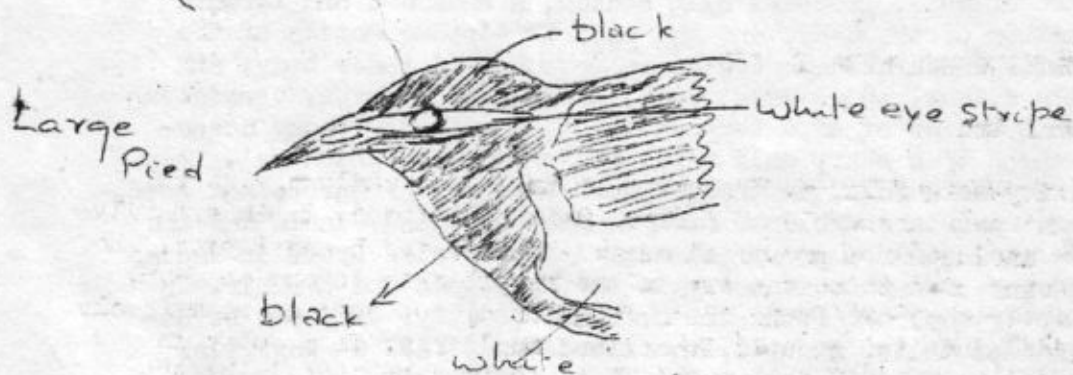
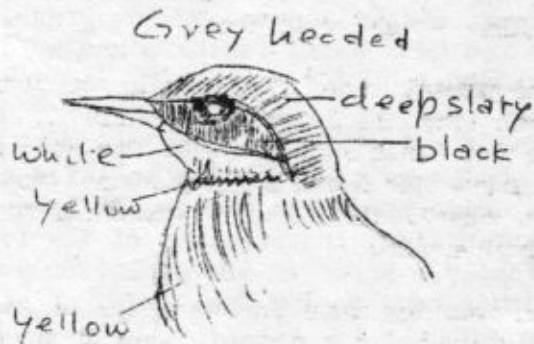
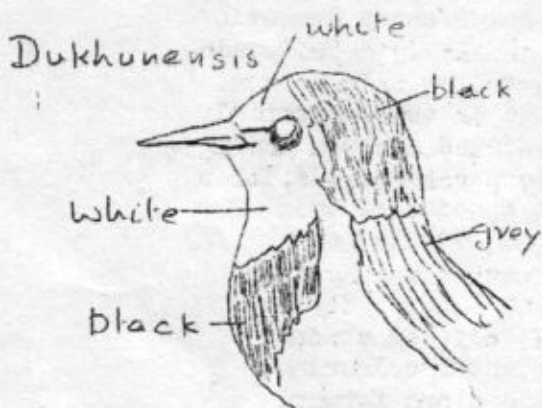
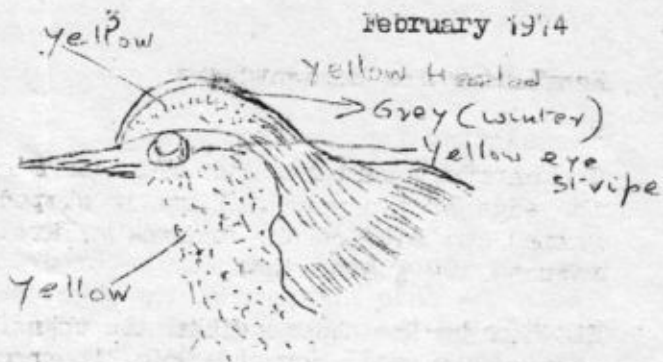
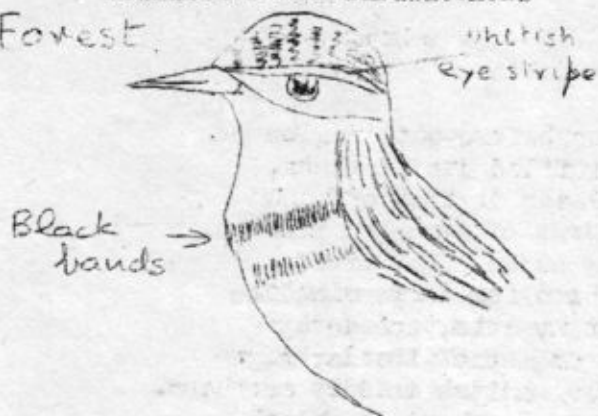
The harrier came low hovering in the wind with dangling feet. It paused for a moment, then dropped into the weeds. It rose, one foot clutching a downy ball, turned and slid away with the wind.

#### VISITING WAGTAILS OF BIHAR

Jamal Ara

Family-Motacillidae. Members of this large family are to be found over the whole of Europe, Asia and Africa. In this family are included two groups of birds — the Wagtails and Pipits. The species of each bear a very close resemblance to one another. They live almost entirely on the ground, but some of them freely perch on trees, bushes, fences and buildings. They roost in trees, bushes and reed-beds. Their natural habitat is by the river side, on the margin of ponds and pools, damp ground, meadows, marshes, irrigated and harvested fields. Some of the Pipits, however, affect bare stony plains. They are sociable birds and are generally found in flocks, in small parties or pairs. They walk and run on the ground with great speed by short jerky movements. Do not hop. When still, wag their tails up and down continually. They feed chiefly on insects, sometimes making little sallies into the air after the quarry. Some eat grains and seeds also. They are intermediate in character between the larks and the warblers, having a single plated tarsus like the latter, and the shape of the wings similar to the larks — the inner secondary quills being exceptionally long. They have slender bills of moderate length; the tail is long but not graduated. The wagtails are usually of black, white, grey and yellow plumage, without streaks, the Pipits,

Forest



on the other hand, are earth-coloured birds of streaked plumage. Both the male and female are practically alike. They breed mostly on the ground or on the edges of rock or in some hollow in a bank, wall, or old tree. The nesting habits, specially those of the Pipits, are very similar to those of the larks, even the colouring of the eggs, which are whitish or clay coloured with spots and markings all over. Nests are made of moss, twigs, leaves, roots, grasses, etc. loosely constructed, lined with hair, feathers and wool. Both sexes share domestic duties.

The family 'Motacillidae' is most developed in the Eastern Hemisphere to which the wagtails are restricted (though one species breeds in the Arctic Zone of Western Alaska). It is surprising, indeed, that of the fifty-two species of this family known in the world, only eight (all Pipits) are indigenous to the New World.

The Wagtails belong to Genus 'Motacilla'. They are at once distinguished from the Pipits by their brighter colouring, longer tail, graceful slim bodies, a backward and forward motion of the head, and the curious dipping motion of the tail, which accompanies every movement of their body; and the flight, which is strongly undulating curves, consisting of a series of dips through the air, each dip being accompanied by a sharp call note, 'Chiz-zit' or 'Chichips'. They breed as a rule, in the northern portions of Europe and Asia, and migrate south in winter to Africa, China, India and the Malayan peninsula and islands. A few species breed in India proper, and those chiefly in the Himalayas and Kashmir. In winter they are found all over the country. They can be divided into two groups, the 'Pied' and 'Yellow' Wagtails.

The Forest or Black-breasted Wagtail, Motacilla Indica, is a rare winter visitor to Bihar. Inglis collected a specimen at Baghowmie (Darbhanga). I saw one at Chaibassa (Singbhum) and one at Doranda (Ranchi). It is about the size of a sparrow. The colour pattern of the body is more of a small game bird than a Wagtail, that merges effectively in the background. A closer look, however, reveals that its upper plumage is a mixture of olive-green, brown and black, with a whitish eye-stripe extending from the bill to the nape; blackish-brown wings with two yellowish-white bars; and the under surface white tinged yellow on the chin, throat and breast; two black bands on the breast meeting in the centre so as to form two rings. It is a shy and solitary bird. Its normal gait is a sedate walk, unlike the lively actions of other Wagtails. The most distinctive feature about this Wagtail, besides its markings, is its habits of swaying both body and tail from side to side instead of the usual wagtail manners of jerking the tail up and down.



When disturbed, it flies up into the nearest tree, uttering a loud 'sink, sink'. It frequents thin open jungle, shady orchards or rocky places. Breeds in Siberia, North China and the Hills of North Cachar.

Three species of yellow wagtails, differing chiefly in the head are quite common in Bihar during the winter season. They have been designated as '*Motacilla flava*', with yellow on the breast, except the Grey and Yellow-headed Wagtails. The Yellow Wagtail has a very wide range in the old world, and has developed a number of races with its own breeding area. The sub-species are differentiated mainly by the variations in the plumage, specially the colours of the heads of the male birds in breeding phase.

The Grey-headed Yellow Wagtail, *Motacilla flava thunbergi*, has the whole head, from bill to the nape (Forehead, Crown and nape) deep slaty (lighter in Winter); lores, ear-coverts and cheeks almost black. No eye-stripe (or a slight one); chin white. Throat yellow. Upper Parts olive-green; lower parts pure yellow. In Winter fade to an ashy-greenish above, dull pale yellow below, with dark speculating on the breast. When it arrives in October, the male is so richly coloured a bird that he cannot escape notice. It has been observed in Hazaribagh, Ranchi, Patna and North Bihar from October to March. In Monghyr it is very numerous, where it is called 'Chutia Pankhi' in Hindi. Its flight is accompanied by two shrill twittering notes. Breeds in north Scandinavia, Russia and Siberia.

The Blue-headed Yellow Wagtail, *M.f. beerna*, or *Pilkya* (Hindi), is distinguished from the Grey-headed by the bluish-grey forehead, crown and nape; a broad and distinct white eye-stripe extending from the base of the nostrils to above the ear-coverts; white line running below lores and ear-coverts, which are of an ash-grey with some white markings; cheeks, chin and throat white. Rest of the upperparts yellowish-olive green, brighter in the rump; underparts yellow. In autumn the bird gets a brown tinge over the upperparts, and more white on the throat. It breeds in Ladakh, Kashmir, Tibet and Russia. It arrives in the first week of September and leaves in early May, has been observed in Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Patna, S. Monghyr and Darbhanga. It is less common than the Grey-headed one.

The Black-headed yellow wagtail, *M.f. melanogri-sea*, has black forehead, crown, and nape; lores, ear-coverts and cheeks deep black; a white line running under the lores to the ear-coverts, (often missing); chin white; no eye-stripe. Olive-green above, yellow below. It breeds in Turkestan and Persia. Rare in the state, has been observed in Hazaribagh and once in Ranchi, near Jonha falls.

The Yellow-headed Wagtail, *M. Citreola Citreola*, or *Pania pillkya* (Hindi), has the whole head, including ear-coverts, chin, throat and a broad eye-stripe, as well as under surface bright yellow; nape and back ashy-grey; back is never mixed with black. In Winter crown turns grey like the back, but the forehead, eye-stripe, sides of the head and lower portion retain yellow.

Very common all over Bihar from the end of September to early May. It has been observed feeding in flocks with Yellow Wagtails near the Ganga. It loves to be in the neighbourhood of grazing animals, feeding around their legs. Breeds in Russia.

(To be continued).

#### WHICH FLYCATCHER IS THIS ?

D.K. Vaidya

Before introducing the bird, I have to introduce myself. I am no beginner since I have been watching birds since 1942. During this time I have identified 208 species in my home town in this district of Surendranagar. I make use of my 8 x 30 binoculars and refer to my collection of books which include Whistler, Salim Ali (6th edition), Birds of Saurashtra and the Field Guide to Birds of Britain and Europe.

Now for the bird. It was seen here at Dhrangadhra from 18.9.1973 to 25th or so. The size was that of the Red-breasted and the shape that of the spotted but it looked like neither. It did not flick its tail either downwards like the spotted or upwards like the Red-breasted and had no black T to show in the midst of white.

The colour was dark greyish or earthy brown above and dull whitish below but with this distinction of having orange buff or chestnut edges to the wing coverts and wing feathers - less distinct on the lesser coverts and the primaries and more distinct on the greater coverts and the secondaries. The latter created three distinct Vs on the lower back ending in the angle at the rump. The tail was similarly edged and the rump more so.

The chief characteristics were these - a very large white patch around the eye. I say patch because it was triangular and broad ending in an angle towards the base of the bill in front and less broad behind with only thin lines above and below. There were three white angles pointing at the base of the bill. One was that of the very white chin, another was that of the moustachial stripe which was slightly broader towards the shoulders. The breast was greyish, abdomen whitish with under tail coverts distinctly so. The pose was angular, neither horizontal nor upright. It had large round dark eyes, legs fleshy pink and bill darkish horny as I remember.

The picture in the Field Guide of the female Pied Flycatcher resembled this bird, the white patch being on the wing instead of on the eye. I turned far "accidentals" at the end of the book and saw a description which said "Resembles female Pied Flycatcher: distinguished by absence of white wing patch and at close range narrow white eye ring. Distinguished from Spotted Flycatcher by smaller size and lack of streaking on crown and breast". This was the Brown Flycatcher.



I read this description for two reasons. One, no other bird either from India or abroad was likely to visit this place ! Second, my friend Shri Lal Singhji Raol had told me that he had seen the Brown Flycatcher in the Gir Forest with Shri K.S. Lavlamarsinghji.

This town though in the most barren district has wooded gardens and farms and I have seen the Indian Pitta and the Golden backed Woodpecker here.

Will anybody corroborate my observations? Meanwhile I should like to know if this bird, assuming it to be the Brown Flycatcher, is a winter visitor to the Gir Forest and Southern Saurashtra or just a passage migrant like the Spotted Flycatcher. Here it seems to have been a passage migrant as I have not observed it again in the neighbourhood.

[The legs are described to be fleshy pink and if this observation is correct does not agree with the colouration of any of the above mentioned flycatchers. Otherwise, from the description it is most probably the Brown Flycatcher (Muscicapa lativostris) which is said to be a Siberian species and as such bound to fly south for the winter. Dry scrub vegetation should be to its liking - Ed.]

#### NOTES AND COMMENTS

The XVI World Conference of the International Council for Bird Preservation is to be held in Canberra, Australia from 19th to 25th August 1974 at the Australian National University.

Those who are interested may write to :

Miss Phyllis Barclay-Smith  
International Council for Bird Preservation  
C/o British Museum (Natural History)  
Cromwell Road, London S.W. 7  
ENGLAND.

The registration forms must be sent back to reach Miss Barclay-Smith before 31st May 1974.

.....

Mr. Zafer Rutehally is now a permanent resident of Bangalore. (see back cover for his address). Birdwatchers in this region can look forward to getting together for organised birdwatching and exchange of information. A list of Bangalore members is being sent to such members with this issue.



CORRESPONDENCE

'Pleasant Parakeets'

On Christmas day I saw some 50 parakeets which approached my kitchen garden with a "ten" "ten" call and sat on a tree. I quietly went inside and brought my camera and before I could set my 200 mm tele lens, a boy threw a stone and the parakeets disappeared. I was very sorry especially as I could see that all the parakeets were not alike. They were not rose ringed. Some were having red or pinkish and some yellowish bills. Similarly there were differences in their tails. While breakfasting on the tree they were as noisy as when they were flying. Certainly they were migratory but what was the point in flying over Kulu when my thermometer was reading a room temperature of 7° C. Kindly clear my doubts.

N.K. Bajpai

[The information provided by Mr. Bajpai is too scanty to express any positive opinion. Even though the boy chased away the parakeets before proper observation could be made, it should be possible to tell us the identity of the tree and what the parakeets were eating. Local migrations and even long distance migration of birds seem to be more governed by the availability of food than by temperatures as judged by human standards of comfort. All rose ringed parakeets do not wear a coloured collar. Only adult males acquire the rose ring in their third year. Slaty headed parakeets are also prevalent in that region.

Mr. Bajpai is requested to continue his observations and not be deterred by one case of stone throwing which is a congenital gift of our youth. - Ed.]

NOTE FROM BANGALORE

Fifteen birdwatchers of Bangalore assembled at the residence of Mr. Zafar Futehally on 20.1.1974 to discuss the plans and programmes for bird watching activities in and around Bangalore. This assembly was thanks to the initiative of Dr. V.J. Victor who is the de facto Secretary of the Bangalore bird watching fraternity.

The following points were raised for discussion :-

- 1) Mr. Futehally suggested that a check list of birds of Bangalore and district, i.e., resident, migrant, occasional visitor, etc., may be prepared. Dr. Joseph George pointed out the existence of a publication by Dr. Salim Ali on the birds of the Old Mysore State. Dr. Gadgil was

requested to prepare a list of birds of Bangalore and adjacent areas on the basis of Dr. Salim Ali's paper. This could form the core of the checklist to be prepared.

- 2) Mr. Futehally raised the question of bird banding. It was agreed that for the time being Bannerghatta National Park and Raman Institute Campus may be selected as sites for bird banding activities. It was also suggested that coloured rings may be used to study the range of some commonly occurring birds like the Red Whiskered Bulbul.
- 3) Mr. Futehally also suggested that all the bird watchers in Bangalore might keep individual notes on the relationship between birds and the different species of trees, particularly exotic species, on which they are commonly found. Then, once in six months or so all the notes could be compared and it may be possible to draw some generalised conclusion.
- 4) Mr. V. Abraham expressed his interest in Economic Ornithology and asked the group if any bird activities in this line could be taken up for the Bangalore area. It was decided that a few of the representative insect eating birds may be caught and dissected to analyse their stomach contents for determining which insects they preferentially ate and to what extent. The advantages of using birds as pest controlling agents in place of chemical pesticides were noted. Hebbal Agricultural University Campus was selected as the site for this purpose and Mrs. Sundari Bai was requested to give necessary help and entomological expertise required for this purpose.
- 5) Mr. Joseph George asked the group whether it is possible to find ways and means of encouraging Magpie Robin population in Bangalore and discouraging the population growth of the jungle crow. Mr. Futehally narrated the experience of the group at Bombay with respect to the jungle crow population and expressed his opinion that it is a fairly difficult job. The group decided to consider this point in greater detail at a later date.
- 6) It was decided that the first field outing for bird watching and bird ringing will be to Bannerghatta National Park on Sunday the 3rd February 1974. The group would meet at 2 p.m. on that day near "Cauvery", the Mysore Arts and Crafts Centre on the Mahatma Gandhi Road, Bangalore.

---

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# NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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NEWSLETTER FOR  
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Volume 14, Number 3

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BIRD-WATCHING AT YERAVDA, 27.1.74.

Thomas Gay.

Just after 7 a.m., some twenty members of our Poona group assembled at the north end of the Bund Bridge, and followed P.V.G. along the Mula-Mutha's left bank into a misty red sunrise. Those of us who, despite many years' residence in Poona, had never seen this bird-paradise before, owe our keen Organiser an immense debt of gratitude.

Almost from the very piers of the Bridge, the surface of the river was teeming with bird life. Easily the most numerous species consisted of Black-winged Stilts, of which scores and scores showed themselves everywhere — wading belly deep, standing tall and stately on the stones scattered all over the river bed, or flying to some fresh perch or pool. Flights of Small Egrets passed up-stream, most of them congregating not far from the Bridge; one little flight of four Smalls were attached to a single large, reminiscent of destroyers escorting a cruiser, and giving us an excellent chance to compare sizes. A flock of ten Dabchicks kept strictly to themselves, and were the only "non-mixers" among all these birds. Here and there a lone Cormorant perched like a black stump or hung out his spread wings in a heraldic pattern. On every side, solitary Paddybirds waited hunched and gray. In one pool swam three nervous Garganeys, who flew off all too soon; they returned an hour later, found their river still contaminated by our presence, and retired for good.

Sandpipers were plentifully represented by the Common, the Spotted, and the Green. Yellow (black-headed?) and Pied Wagtails ran about on twinkling feet or travelled from place to place with their undulating flight. Two Moorhens (immature, probably: no red or white anywhere) busied themselves about a bundle of water-hyacinth wedged against a rock; a White-breasted Kingfisher plunged from a rocky island and returned with empty beak; a few Red-wattled Lapwings uttered their reproachful cries or flew on bowed wings just above the river's surface. The whole scene was carefully surveyed by a Marsh Harrier, and afterwards --- more briefly --- by a Pale Harrier. A small flock of Stints wheeled above the water on flashing wings, never settling though always seeming about to settle. Three Terns that beat slowly up and down, as Terns do, provoked some argument as to their species; the final verdict seemed to favour "Gull-billed", in view of the black beak and feet and the pure white head. These birds were later seen to have joined a flock resting not far below the Bridge.

And now, as we learned to inspect each group of birds more closely, came some exciting discoveries. In two or three scattered places we saw a Fan-tailed Snipe strutting boldly among larger birds as he probed the water washing the edge of a rock. One party of mid-river Stilts included a single Common Teal sitting on a stone (a wounded bird? else, why not with its fellows, somewhere?); another party had been joined by a busy Redshank. Some mid-stream grasses half concealed a tailless Pheasant-tailed Jacana. It was not uncommon for four or five species to be grouped together --- it might be, some Stilts, an Egret, two different Sandpipers, and a Paddybird --- all in the most perfect trust and harmony. What a lesson for us humans!

It was FVG who pointed out the Bluethroats, two singles and a pair that hopped and flitted among the rocks near which we sat; the gorgeous breast of summer was faded and dingy, but traces of the blue and scarlet could be made out. A pair of Hoopoes flew ahead of us, as we turned for home; two Little Brown Doves crept down to a pool, and a gleaming Green Bee-eater sunned itself on a rocky slope. Other birds of the Bank were Rufous-tailed and Black-bellied Finch-lark, a Skylark (Small Indian?) and a Grey Partridge that called once and was never seen. Indian Swifts and Common Swallows swung about the air above us, a Rufous-backed Shrike kept vigil from a babhul spray, and our list of 37 birds was completed by one each of an unremarkable trio: House Crow, Red-vented Bulbul, and Blue Pigeon.



## VISITING WAGTAILS OF BIHAR (in continuation of last issue)

Jamal Ara.

The Hodgson's Yellow-headed Wagtail, M. citreola calcarata, or Pania pilkya, breeds in Himalayas from 5,000 to 15,000 feet. Freely breeds in Kashmir from May to June, where it is very common during Summer. Also in Central Asia from Afghanistan, Persia to Tibet.

In Summer the bird looks most beautiful in having jet black back, bright yellow head, neck and lower portion, with some white in wings and tail. Even in Winter the bird retains black of the back, from which it can be easily differentiated from M.c.citreola. This bird is mostly a water-loving species, and is never away from wet places. Not common in Bihar though few birds have been observed in Hazaribagh, Darbhanga and Patna from time to time.

The Grey Wagtail, M. caespica, or Rakhi pilkya, is distinguished from all the other Wagtails by the greater length of the tail, and the uniform; slate blue of the upperparts including head, relieved by a white eye-stripe (yellowish in Winter); chin, throat and foreneck white; underparts sulphur yellow, brightest on the under-tail coverts. The three outer tail feathers are white. In flight the long tail, and sulphur yellow lower surface are conspicuous. Arrives in early August and leaves in May. Mostly found solitary near rocky stream of the jungle, or at marshy places. Breeds all across Central Europe, Asia and in the Himalayas between 6000 and 12000 ft. elevation. It has a sharp 'Chiccheep-chiccheep' call note, uttered on the wing.

The commonest Winter visiting Wagtail to Bihar and the one that is seen in the largest number is the White Wagtail. It is a dainty looking bird with varying mixtures of black, white, and grey in the plumage. Out of six geographical races into which this bird has been divided, only four are of interest to us.

One of the commonest races is the Indian White Wagtail, M. alba dudukunensis, or Dhobin; is easily recognised by its grey back; a black patch extending from the crown to the nape, connecting a crescentic gorget on the breast; front face, cheeks, ear-coverts and underparts white; wings black, broadly margined with grey and white; tail black with two outer-most feathers white. In Summer the grey on the back of the male is replaced by black, and the black of the breast extends right upto the chin.

Its flight is as distinctive as its appearance. On the ground - curving, dipping, erratic, spreads tail. Manners on the ground are impulsive - stands, runs, wags tail, flies, stands, flies a short way, stands, wags tail. Follows cattle. The call is a double chirp, 'Tizit-tizit'. Most confiding bird preferring towns, villages, and gardens, particularly fallow fields, feeding in large scattered flocks. Very fond of walking on the wet sand of forest streams, leaving behind a beautiful tracery of delicate foot prints.

It is one of the earliest to arrive, reaching Bihar about the second week of August, and stays till about the end of April. Breeds in West Siberia to Yenisei, Turkestan etc.

Less common is the Masked or Black-faced Wagtail, M.a. personata or Dhobin. This wagtail has the crown, nape, ear-coverts, sides of the neck, throat and breast - black. (It appears to have a tight-fitting black cap on its head); a broad white frontal band extends to the front of the eye as to form a narrow eye-stripe; sides of face, chin, and lowerparts from below the breast and under wing coverts are white. The amount of black on the breast, sides of the neck, throat and ear-coverts at once serve to distinguish it from dukkunensis. It has been found in Darbhanga, and Patna. Quite tame and loves to live near human habitation. Starts coming in August, departing in early April. Breeds in Turkestan, Gilgit, Afghanistan, Eastern Persia. Within our limits it breeds in Kashmir and NWF Province between 6000 and 12000 ft.

Hodgson's Wagtail, M.a. alboides, or Dhobin. In it the grey of the upper plumage is replaced by black. Forehead, crown, lores, cheeks, feathers round the eye (or a ring) white; ear-coverts black; chin, throat and breast black; remaining under plumage white. In Winter it is deep ashy grey on the back; the chin is white; the feathers of the foreneck and throat are mottled with white.

This wagtail prefers well-wooded open country as well as forest and frequents streams and running water. The call is 'Chichip-chichip'. Visits some part of Bihar in less number. Breeds in Kashmir, parts of the higher Himalayas and Southern Tibet.

The White-faced Wagtail, M. maderaspatensis or Khanjan, is rather larger and darker than the white wagtail and resembles the Magpie Robin in colour pattern. Its whole upper plumage, including head, chin, throat and breast - black, except for a narrow white eye-stripe from the nostril to the nape; wings black, quills edged with white; a broad white patch running the whole length of the folded wing; tail black with two outer pairs of feathers white; remainder of lower plumage white.

Most solitary of wagtails. Generally goes about in pairs, less often in family parties, and rarely, indeed, in flocks. Does not mind loneliness and is met with at places where least expected. More fond of flying than the others of its clan. Every time the wings open more white is displayed and the bird appears brighter and bigger, as the wings close it seems to fold into itself. It has a sweet song during Summer. Resident throughout India, and is the only wagtail which breeds South of the Himalayas. Quite common in Bihar from September to May.

NOTE - All the wagtails are annual Winter visitors to the plains. They are purely beneficial species, and should be encouraged in every way. But unfortunately the wagtails and Pipits are most favoured birds for table, and are sold by mirshikars as 'bageris' for Rs.6/= a dozen. See, how we display our hospitality towards these guests by murdering them in thousands each Winter !

[The figures on page No. 3 in the February issue of the Newsletter at the bottom left hand corner should read "Blue Headed" - Ed. 7.]

#### ATTRACTING BIRDS

Abraham Verghese

Attracting birds, is an important amateur activity, quite popular in Western countries. During winter when snow envelops the green earth and food becomes scarce, a Bird Feeding Station is the most welcoming sign to birds. But Feeding Stations are not the only means of attracting birds, Particularly in Peninsular India, where winter is not so severe, with plenty of insects for the visiting migrants and resident birds. Bird attraction is a year round hobby and includes besides feeding station, the provision of small shrubs, trees and flowering plants. The last mentioned was that which I took up.

In Dr. Arthur A. Allen's "The Book of Bird Life", I saw a caption which ran thus, "plant Sun flowers for Goldfinches and Chickadees". That gave me the start. Soon, the Sun flower plants grew, flowers blossomed, and I was waiting patiently. Patience paid at last. For on the morning of 9.IX.73 I was greeted with sharp keek keeks, which brought me out into the garden. There I could see a green bird, sitting on one of the flowers which, with its bright radiating yellow against the orangish morning sky, lulled me into a world of serenity that knew nothing but freedom and joy. The bird was a male Rose Ringed Parakeet. What a contrast to a caged bird of the same kind !



The number of parakeets that visited my garden ranged from two to six, and they were mostly in the morning hours. It is not the bright colour of the flower which attracts these birds, but it is the matured seeds. The mode of feeding is very interesting to watch. Now, in a sunflower the seeds are arranged in concentric circles. So the bird which alights on the flower first starts feeding on the outermost circle, then it works its way inwards in a rotatory manner, splitting one seed after another with its hook shaped bill, until about one third of the flower is complete. The remaining is completed in the subsequent days. These birds do not eat the seed as a whole, but split it and feed only on the inner content. In majority of the split seeds examined by me, I found that only a very little of inner content was eaten, the rest were wasted.

The importance of attracting birds, by means of growing plants which provide food or shelter, lies in the fact that it enables one to study a bird at a close range in its natural setting in one's own field laboratory or garden. It would be good, if our Bird Watchers could contribute in making a list of plants that could attract different kinds of birds, as is being done in Western Countries, so that we can augment the progress of Indian Ornithology.

#### IN THE NORTH-EAST

Ananta Mitra

In the autumn of 1972, my brother and I had been to the Jaldapara wild life sanctuary in West Bengal. The sanctuary consisting of swampy forest of about 100 sq. Km. is in the district of Jalpaiguri at the foot of the Himalayas.

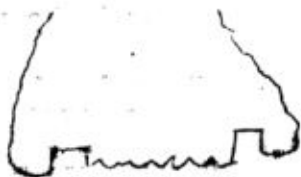
The swamp overgrown with tall elephant grass interspersed with patches of trees and criss-crossed with creeks and canals spread for miles together.

To rove about on the back of elephant in this vast still forest, overlooked by the gigantic Himalayan range is an unforgettable experience.

The sanctuary is famous as the habitat for the Great Indian One-horned Rhinos (Rhinoceros unicornis). A few of them are still struggling here against the marauding poachers. We were fortunate to see two of these brilliant animals during our stay.

On 25th, 26th and 27th October '72 we observed a number of birds in this marshy forest.

Some varieties of drongo (Dicruridae) drew our particular attention. They were the Black Drongo (Dicrurus adisiimilis) Hair-Crested drongo (Dicrurus hottentottus) and the Racket-tailed drongo (Dicrurus paradiseus). The last mentioned ones were found in plenty. Apart from them we found another drongo which looked like a Black drongo but instead of the usual fork tail it had a square tail with two notches at the end.



We could not find any explanation to this phenomenon. Can it be a new species? Or, is it some seasonal phase of other species? We found three such individual birds - one in the compound of the forest lodge.

In the forest we came across a large flock of about fifty Orange-breasted green pigeon (Treron bicincta). They were feeding on the ripe berries of Kainjal trees (Bischofia javanica) which grow here in abundance.

A small flock of six Red-breasted Parakeet (Psittacula alexandri) was also found. They moved across a clearing with their sharp and harsh flight-call Ka-Ka-Ka-Ka.

In a patch of sal trees (Shorea robusta) we got a Black-naped green wood pecker (Picus canus).

The mountainous river Torsha turbulently flows through the forest. Crossing this river on the back of elephant was a thrilling affair. On the bank of a creek of Torsha we found Common Kingfisher (Alcedo atthis), Rose-ringed Parakeet (Psittacula krameri), Cattle egrets (Bubulcus ibis) and Jungle crows (Corvus macrorhynchos)...

In the foliage we came across Jungle babblers (Troglodytes striatus), Common wood shrike (Tephrodornis pondicerianus), Spotted dove (Streptopelia chinensis), Tree Pie (Dendrocitta vagabunda), Common Iora (Aegithina tiphia) and Lined barbet (Megalaima zeylonica).

In the trees we came upon a species of squirrel somewhat larger than ordinary, having no white stripes on the back.

## COMMENTS ON THE FLIGHT OF THE MONAL PHEASANT

J.R. Dhanze

I read the article entitled "Bird Watching in the Tehri Garhwal Hills" by Sohan Singh Saini, in the Newsletter for Birdwatchers Vol. XIII No. 12. On page 2 and subsequently on page 4 para 3, the author has mentioned the flight of the Monal pheasant.

According to his observation the flight of the Monal pheasant is circular, but I do not agree with my friend Mr. Sohan Singh Saini. No doubt the flight of this High Altitude Bird is always accompanied by long continuous whistling but it is never circular.

According to my personal observations regarding the flight of Monal pheasant, it is always straight and of short duration. In August 1973, I had a chance to visit Chur Chandani Peak in District Sirmour, Himachal Pradesh, in order to collect High Altitude mammals and birds, with the Officer-in-Charge Sh. K.K. Mahajan. The maximum altitude of this hill is 11200 feet, almost covered by Pine forest up to 10500 feet and having a good fauna of Birds.

I observed about 16 pairs of Monal pheasant and collected only one pair to display the same in the High Altitude Museum here at Solan. So I had a good opportunity to observe the habit and habitat of birds such as Monal pheasant, Koklash pheasant, Nutcracker, Green-pigeon and many others also. The range of these birds with respect to altitude is from 8500 feet to 10500 feet. I did not find any of the above mentioned birds beyond 10500 feet, because beyond this there is no forest but barren meadows.

Thus the idea of this short note is just a request to my friend Mr. Sohan Singh Saini to clarify the contradictory views expressed by me regarding the flight of the Monal pheasant.

NOTES AND COMMENTS :

If, through the medium of our "Newsletter" we are able to establish a healthy dialogue between our readers, we may succeed in contributing something original to our knowledge of birds and bird behaviour.

In this issue we have a note from Mr. J.R. Dhanze on the flight of the Monal Pheasant as a sequel to an earlier article by Mr. Sohan Singh Saini. We are also publishing a letter from Mr. Th. W. Hoffman, Hon. Secretary of Ceylon Bird Club, offering a solution to Mr. D.K. Vaidya's identification problem of the Flycatcher.



Such dialogues go to prove that our readers do follow the "Newsletter" articles with keen interest and are able to corroborate or contradict the statements made. It must be of considerable satisfaction to our members that through the medium of the "Newsletter" we are able to bring together such distant members for a close discussion.

\* \* \* \*

#### Membership:-

The subscription of Rs.10/= for the current year 1974 is due. Those members who have not yet paid are requested to do so. Cheques may be drawn in favour of Mr. Zafar Futehally or Mrs. L. Nilakanta in whose name our Account stands.

\* \* \* \*

#### CORRESPONDENCE

##### 'Identification of Flycatchers'

I refer to D.K. Vaidya's query about a Flycatcher described by him in your February 1974 Newsletter (p. 6 & 7). The description tallies mostly with that of Layard's Flycatcher (*Muscicapa muttui muttui*) which is a rarely seen though regular winter visitor to Sri Lanka from the Eastern Himalayas, where it breeds. Mr. Vaidya's description does not tally with that of the Brown Flycatcher, it has only a white ring around the large eye, and this is not even very noticeable, which I have observed on quite a number of occasions in Sri Lanka during the winter months. The Layard's Flycatcher is a retiring and shy bird. It is, however, not normally found in dry scrub vegetation, but along forest-fringed rivers or shady places of heavy vegetation near water. In Sri Lanka we have regular reports of its presence in winter from a tea estate at about 4,000 ft. elevation, which is heavily overgrown with shade trees. This area normally receives much rainfall in winter, but is very dry in summer.

Th. W. Hoffmann.

\* \* \* \*

##### 'Borivli National Park'

I visited, after a long time, the Borivli National Park, entering from the Marol approach. Walking along the Tulsi Pipe about two miles away from the Deer Park we encountered a number of youths giving chase to a hare, trying to kill it with the help of sticks and catapults.

Later in the day we picnicked at a spot about two hundred metres away towards the hill, opposite culvert No. 23. At about 3 p.m.

we were approached by a policeman and a plain clothed man, perhaps a warden, who warned us that it was dangerous to wander out of sight of the road, as the area was infested by ruffians who might attack and rob visitors.

I suggest that the whole area be enclosed and visitors allowed only against payment for which a ticket would be issued. Any person not able to produce a ticket or a legitimate reason for his presence should be taken in custody.

(Dr.) A.M. Tyabji.

\* \* \* \*

#### 'An Appreciating Attempt'

It was a common technique for the last few decades, though confined to the areas adjoining Calcutta Zoo Garden at Alipur, to capture migratory winter visitors at the pools.

Poachers fly large kites with the help of nylon thread which carry number of fishing hooks, tied one after another serially from top to bottom for certain lengths at certain altitudes.

Ducks & teals get entangled while returning to their roosting ground in the evening.

Recently it was noticed by Md. Safiullah, M.L.A. West Bengal Assembly who drew attention immediately to the concerned authorities for necessary action. The police rushed in and rounded up the culprits, who were later produced before the District Magistrate, at D.M. Court and were punished by being fined.

R.N. Mukherjee  
Zoological Survey of India

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# NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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VOL XIV NO. 7 JULY 1974



NEWSLETTER FOR  
BIRDPWATCHERS

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July 1974

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THE CHRONOLOGICAL TIME-SENSE IN BIRDS.

Dr. Salim Ali.

No-one who watches birds long and closely enough can fail to be struck by the extreme punctuality and rhythm in their normal daily movements and functions such as feeding and watering at favourite spots, and roosting. Two specific incidents stand out in my memory from a long row of similar experiences. During the winter of 1946, while collecting birds in the Mishmi Hills of Arunachal Pradesh, was on the special lookout for a large kingfisher that had been described to me from the same general locality as enigmatical, by a knowledgeable British ornithologist while on war service a few years previously. One evening, just around sunset, I had strolled up to a rustic bridge over a thickly wooded forest stream and as I was idly casting about with the binoculars, caught a fleeting glimpse through the shrubbery of a large kingfisher which could have answered my friend's description. It came coursing purposefully up the stream, passed under the bridge and disappeared in a flash round a bend, leaving me kicking myself for not being quick enough with the gun. The next evening I again strolled up to the bridge, this time without a gun and no thought of the possibility of seeing that kingfisher there again. However, at about the same time as previously the bird came dashing up the stream, under the bridge, and gone again behind the bend. I looked at my watch; it

was a few minutes to 6 - about the exact time as yesterday. I then suspected that the bird probably followed the same routine every day, maybe to roost somewhere upstream, and decided to try and intercept it. However, according to pre-arranged programme I had to shift camp next morning, therefore it was not until a week later that the place could be visited again. I was curious to know if that Kingfisher was still about so - but without any serious hope - I got to the bridge again before sunset. While wondering whether it would appear at the appointed time, the bird flashed into view through the shrubbery. Before I could think of raising the gun, however, the bird was under the bridge, out the other side, and away behind the bend. My watch showed that it was exactly the same time, to the minute, as on the previous occasion. I now knew what to do. Next evening I was at the bridge betimes. Two minutes before ETA I undid the safety catch and waited in readiness. Sure enough the bird appeared on the dot, and a lucky snap-shot just as it cleared the bridge changed his future address for ever after to C/o Bombay Natural History Society! In the fading light and forest interior the bird did look, as claimed by the reporter, rather blue and intriguing as it flashed past, but on closer examination it turned out to be nothing more exciting than a Himalayan Pied Kingfisher - the eastern form, guttulata, which is darker and more slaty than the western.

On this same Mishmi expedition, my companion Dr. Dillon Ripley was anxious to secure a specimen of the Large Pied Hornbill. On two separate afternoons during the previous week I had noticed a pair of these great birds noisily winging their way above the forest canopy well within shot gun range across an open glade on a hilltop, evidently towards their roost. I casually mentioned this to Dr. Ripley and suggested his going up to a certain point and awaiting their arrival at 4 p.m. sharp on any day! Dr. Ripley was inclined to be justifiably facetious about the precision of the time table, but happening to be in that neighbourhood a couple of days later thought no harm in trying. When the birds did show up punctually on schedule he was so taken aback that he missed with both barrels - at least brought back no hornbill to the camp! But perhaps my most memorable experience of the astonishing sense of chronological time possessed by birds was recently in Bikaner. The famous Gajner Lake, situated about 16 miles from the city, is renowned as a watering place in winter for the migratory Imperial or Blackbellied Sandgrouse (Pterocles orientalis) from miles of the desert around. In pre-independence days it used to be the venue of barbaric 'prestige' shoots by the rulers of Bikaner for the entertainment of Viceroys, Governors and suchlike, and several thousand birds were often slaughtered in a single day's shooting. When visiting the place last January for observation and photography we were informed by game department officials that the birds would come to the water punctually at 9.15 a.m., and advised us to be sure and be 'in our seats' within the shooting butts a few minutes before that time. When we



arrived at the lake at 8.45, in somewhat sneering disbelief, the sky was clear with not a sandgrouse in sight in the air or the ground right up to the horizon. This continued till 9 o' clock, by which time I had begun to have serious doubts whether any birds would come at all! However, things began to happen soon after. The first pack of 4 or 5 scouts arrived as if to reconnoitre the ground 7 minutes after 9. They circled over the drinking place and disappeared towards the desert. Presently small parties and larger flocks started converging on the lake from all directions - at first in tens and twenties, then thirties and fifties, then hundreds, and then apparently thousands. By 9.15 - the promised peak - the air became thick with 'clouds' of sandgrouse, arriving, milling around, and departing - there being not less than 2 to 3 thousand thirsty birds descending to the water at a time, jostling and leap-frogging to gain vantage points. Some alighted directly in the shallows, others on the damp edge whence they shuffled down to wade in belly deep. Each bird took a few hurried sips and was off again in a matter of seconds, making way for the swarm upon swarm that kept coming from 10 to 15 miles or more of the desert around. The traffic continued fast and furious for the next 15 minutes then gradually tapered off till by 9.45 it all but ceased, only a few belated packs arriving intermittently thereafter, and hurriedly drinking and departing. So completely was the sky clear again that a birdwatcher coming only 5 minutes later would scarcely believe the hectic scene enacted here just a few moments before. Watering of Imperial Sandgrouse is certainly one of the most impressive ornithological sights in India or, for that matter, perhaps anywhere in the world. An experience like this leaves one marvelling at the nature of the in-built timing mechanism which can activate a bird with such miraculous precision.

\* \* \* \*

#### OUR BIRD-WATCHING CAPERS IN KASHMIR.

Dr. Miss Goolcheher D. Coyaji & Dr. Miss Shaheda Handy.

We decided to have a vacation in Kashmir, to which place we repaired in April this year. Never having been there previously, we were rather excited and looking forward to it. Both of us being interested in bird-watching, we went armed with binoculars and Salim Ali's "Book of Indian Birds". That was really a good thing because we found Kashmir a veritable bird-watchers paradise.

In all, we saw over 40 different varieties of birds. The rail travel from Bombay to Delhi, and Delhi to Jammu itself afforded us the pleasure of seeing the Kite, Eagle, Black Drongo, Pigeon, Indian Robin, Bank Myna, Sarus Crane, the Common Green Bee-eater and the Slaty-headed Scimitar Babbler. We saw the Sarus Crane near a village hut, very close to people. (It is said that the Sarus Crane is so respected by people that the bird has no fear of humans.)

July 1944

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At Srinagar we were thrilled with daily sights of the Rufous-backed Shrike, the Small Blue Kingfisher, the Hoopoe, the White-cheeked Bulbul and the Common Swallow. One could say that after Crow, Myna, and Sparrow, the Hoopoes were the most commonly seen birds at Srinagar. We saw them usually in pairs, sometimes singly, on the ground hitting hard into it with their long and powerful bills to dig out the worms. Warily, we could approach them to within six feet. There were a large number of Blackbirds, and Starlings to be seen on open grounds and parks. The latter we could identify only after reference to other books. The Starlings were seen in flocks on the ground and quite often, along with Blackbirds, Sparrows and Mynas. When perched on a tree branch, this bird often showed a peculiar shivering movement of its body.

One of the amusing asides to our bird-watching antics, was that we kept going to a book-shop several times (in turns) to refer to the "Birds of Kashmir". To the shop-keeper we had to make a show of interest in buying the book. With the result that after 3 or 4 times we had to abandon this trick!

There were several seen in particular locations. At the bank of the river Jhelum, it was very interesting to observe Little Egret, the Grey Heron and (possibly ?) the Tern; the former two nesting together on large trees there. It was interesting to observe that these birds had their nests together on the large trees. In the parks we saw, among others, the Grey Tit, the Golden Oriole and few varieties of birds which we could not identify at that time, but subsequently did; — the Goldfinch, the Rosefinch and the Yellowfronted Pied Woodpecker. The Goldfinches were seen in groups, feeding on the ground along with sparrows and once with a Rosefinch. We had occasion to observe the Rosefinch only once and that only the male (rose-coloured). Among the parks we visited, was the Golf course, where avid golfers kept shouting to the two girls armed with binoculars, to get out of their way! Several times we saw the Ring Dove among the lovely Chinar trees.

Throughout our stay in Srinagar, we were surprised and amused by the calls of two very common birds of India. The Mynas were so plentiful and loud that we were at times bothered by their constant chatter. Also right at the outset we saw what appeared to us as crows — but with a difference. They were slightly smaller than the House Crow, had a short but sharp bill and no grey colour on the neck. It also had a peculiar guttural call. We called it the 'abnormal crow', till we finally identified it as the Jackdaw.

We were thrilled with our shikara rides into the marshy land. Here we saw the Mallard duck, the Shoveller, numerous Small Blue Kingfishers and were thrilled to see for the first time the Pied Kingfisher (on the Nagin Lake). The Large Pied Wagtail was seen in many places — in parks, particularly at Char Chinar, as well as on the banks of the river Jhelum, and at times on our house-boat on the Dal Lake.

During one of our trips to the Golf Course (in Srinagar), we were thrilled to discover a Hoopoe nest in a tree hole. It was about 4 feet from the ground. In it we saw six eggs and took one out to study it. It was small, about 3 cms. in length, and oval in shape. Unlike the description given in 'The Book of Indian Birds' it was pale greenish grey in colour. The behaviour of the Hoopoe pair was rather interesting. From some distance we could see one Hoopoe (?male), bring in a worm for the other in the nest (?female). As we approached closer they flew away and the pair would not return to the nest for some time after we had replaced the egg, but watched warily from a distance. Much later, to our relief, we saw one back at its nest.

In great anticipation we once took a trip to the "Chidya Ghar", thinking it to be some kind of bird sanctuary or at least an aviary. But what did we find? A museum with a rather shabby collection of terrible looking stuffed birds! However, the fringe benefits were in the form of real birds in the gardens of the museum.

On our excursion to the Shankracharya Hill we saw, among other birds previously seen, the Blue Rock Thrush and the Collared Bushchat. At Harwan Reservoir we saw a pretty blackish coloured bird with a chestnut coloured tail which it kept wagging most of the time. It was the size of a sparrow. The female lacked the chestnut tail, but had a black tail with a white rump. This bird we later identified as the Plumbeous Redstart. A somewhat similar bird, but larger and with a white streak of feathers over its head was seen by a stream in Gulmarg. This was the White-capped Redstart. At Gulmarg we also saw Cinnamon Tree Sparrows, and a shrike like bird, slightly smaller than a bulbul, grey in colour, having a white spot over each wing and a white streak over each eye. This bird we have not been able to identify to date.

We gave the name "Crested Tit" to a bird we saw at Pahalgam, and later at Gulmarg. It was smaller than, but very similar to the Grey Tit, but with greyish underparts and a prominent black crest. Later we learnt it was the Black Tit. We were fascinated to watch a pair of Black Tits build their nest among the stones in a road embankment. One (?male) was tearing at the grass and bringing bits of it to the nest site, while the other (?female) was sitting close by on a branch watching. Once the bird building the nest was unable to find its site, and the other one guided it to the place. At Sonamarg we saw a sparrow sized bird, buff grey coloured with black and white stripes on the head, and yellow and black streaks on the wings; which we later identified as the Eastern Meadow Bunting.



the

We had unique experience of seeing 14 different varieties of birds, just sitting in one spot in half an hour. This was in the garden of the hotel in Achhabal. Though the variety of species included the Crow, Myna and Sparrow we felt it was a rather uncommon experience. They were the following: the Crow, Indian Myna, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail, Grey Tit, Small Blue Kingfisher, Goldfinch, Plumbeous Redstart, Black Drongo, Blackbird, Starling, Hoopoe, Rufous-backed Shrike, and the White Cheeked-Bulbul.

We found our trip very rewarding towards the end we had two special bonuses! On our way to Pahalgam, in the gardens at Kularnag, we suddenly saw a beautiful scarlet and black slender bird flitting among the branches of a tree -- the Scarlet Minivet which we both identified immediately though we had never seen one before. Soon after we saw the female too; bright yellow and black. Once again we saw the Scarlet Minivet -- in the air this time -- during our bus journey from Srinagar to Jammu. On our last-but-one day in Srinagar we were just resting on a wall by the roadside and we happened to look up at the Chinar trees (by now this looking up at trees had become a constant habit with us!); and lo and behold, a male Paradise Flycatcher beautifully hovering and twisting and turning between two trees.

Our trip was rounded off with a Whitebreasted Kingfisher and a beautiful Blue Jay seen on our return journey from Srinagar to Jammu, and a Chestnut-headed Bee-Eater, Black Winged Stilts and Red-wattled Lapwings seen on the way from Jammu to Delhi. Cancellation of trains which necessitated our return to Bombay by air, perforce put an end to further bird watching.

\* \* \* \*

#### RANDOM BIRDS.

Winston Creado.

I am afraid this article, though brief, is long overdue, but having resolved to make a report on certain bird observations, I must set it down before it is altogether too late. I would like to start with the birds of Juhu :-

On the 21st September last year, I observed the Wryneck in my garden. At first I had difficulty in deciding whether I was looking at a snake or a lizard, or a bird - so reptilian in form and colouring and patterning and movement was this bird; at length, however, I decided that it was a bird and having so decided, proceeded to identify it without more ado.

In September, too, I saw a typical falcon in my garden which was rather like a Lanner Falcon exciting to see this sensuously sleek and streamlined bird, and thrilling to watch it streak across the flaming vertex of the noonday sun.

The Verditor Flycatcher made a brief stopover here in November.

Also, about November, I observed the first Pied Mynas (a pair), in Juhu, although they seemed to be already quite common slightly further east in Vile Parle, Sion and Chembur.

[In November, Rosy Pastors (Sturnus roseus) are quite common - the rose colour being just off-white. Unless one looks for the orbital skin around the eyes, one is likely to mistake the Rosy Pastor, at a casual glance, for a Pied Myna (S. contra). - Ed.]

In March, on a visit to the swamps that borders the Juhu Airport, I saw flocks of Grey Wagtails and immense swarms of Kentish Plovers, apart from the egrets and other waders in winter plumage. I suppose the wagtails and plovers were flattening up for their migratory trips - at any rate.

Pushp Raj (my dog - who is also a bird lover) afforded me a very spectacular view of these birds as he kept charging into their midst, like an heraldic white stallion, and stirring them up into immense wheeling fluttering swarms.

In the garden of the Samaya Press at Sion, in addition to the Pied Mynas, I also observed on several occasions a greyish blue flycatcher, which was shaped just like a black naped blue monarch but had a grey blue head and a brownish back. It was relatively tame and allowed a very close approach, nevertheless, it never took me into its confidence, as to what species it exactly was.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### A GLEANING.

Thomas Gay.

While reading the much-loved English classic of Fishing, Isaac Walton's "The Compleat Angler", I came on the following :-

... Much of this has been observed by tying a riband, or some known tape or thread, in the tail of some young Salmons, which have been taken in weirs as they have swimm'd towards the salt water, and then by taking a part of them again with the known mark at the same place at their return from the sea, which is usually about six months after; and the like experiment hath

been tried upon young swallows, who have, after six months' absence, been observed to return to the same chimney, there to make their nests and habitations for the summer following.

"The Compleat Angler" was written in A.D. 1653, so that the above is a very early instance of scientific "banding". Does any reader know of any earlier instance?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### AN APPEAL

Editorial Note by K.S. Iavkumar.

Peter Jackson, Director of Information World Wildlife Fund, Morges gives us the good news about Sultanpur lake being made into a Sanctuary. I am happy and shall make it a point to visit it when I next am in Delhi.

Peter Jackson writes "And so Sultanpur became a Sanctuary for the birds, and for the pleasure of man". Now I would like to ask one question, would similar sanctuaries be set up with such commendable alacrity if such appeals are made to State Governments and the Prime Minister by an ordinary Indian? Well let me try.

Since I am a Gujarati, I shall speak for Gujarat last, why? I do not wish to be considered a "Provincialist". So, I would like to send my appeal right across the country to Orissa and urge the State Government to declare the islands of the Chilka lake a bird Sanctuary. I had the privilege of making a survey of the lake for the B.N.H.S. as a site suitable for bird-banding. What I saw astounded me. If any spot can be developed into a recreational area, Chilka can undoubtedly be so. Here there is magnificent scenery, plenty of space for houseboats, water-skiing, sun-bathing and plenty of birds. Calcutta, a teeming metropolis is only a night's journey by rail, the main railway from Calcutta to Madras skirts the western shore of the lake as does the highway providing easy access.

During winter there are huge flocks of Flamingos, and I saw a flock of Lesser Flamingos as well. Ducks of all species are in myriads and one has to see the density of Brahminy Duck to believe; nowhere else apart from Tibetan lakes can so many of them be seen. I also recorded the Shelduck here. The mudflats are teeming with waders, Grey Plovers, Stints, Ruff and Reeves, Blacktailed Godwits being the commonest among others. There were several species of Gulls, Sandpipers and Wagtails. A large Banyan tree was full of Grey-headed Mynahs, Bulbuls, and other terrestrial birds and in the topmost bough was a huge nest of a pair of Whitebellied Sea Eagles. Another pair of these fine eagles nested on another large tree on an adjacent island. I wonder where one can hope to see two Whitebellied Sea Eagles, a Pallas Fishing Eagle, an Imperial Eagle, a



Tawny Eagle, an Osprey, a Brahminy Kite and Pariah Kites all perched in a row along a mud embankment. Well, I have seen such a sight on an island in the middle of the lake.

Where else would Pintail be so numerous as to make the soil charged with dropping as concentrated as in a duck farm. This precisely is what I found on the same island which is unique in that it is surrounded by a high pallisade by local fisher folk which can be used for siting observation hides. Sitting in these one can watch and photograph the congregations of birds on the marshy island. Those pallisades and their fish traps are a feature of the Chilka and so the birds accept them and come quite close.

I could go on writing about the wonderful potentials of the Chilka suffice here to say that here we have a location for recreation, shikar and sanctuary, closely interwoven with the normal lives of the local people, and a magnificent situation for a bird-banding station to study movements of waterbirds on the eastern sea board.

On the sandunes separating the lake actually a lagoon - from the sea are dense stands of Casaurina trees and the area could become a habitat for Spotted Deer.

This then is my appeal No. 1 and may the World Wildlife Fund and the IUCN heed my piping cry and magnify it into a bugle blast to reach the ears of those who can wave the magic wand.

\* \* \* \* \*



CORRESPONDENCE

May I correct a small linguistic error in the extremely interesting article, appearing in our May issue, contributed by Sarvashri Ghorpade, Verghese and Mallik.

At the top of page 3 occur words which show the authors to have relied on the basic rule of Latin that "nouns ending in a are feminine." Actually, there are exceptions to this rule; e.g., "nauta" (or, "navita") meaning a sailor, "poeta" meaning a (male or female) poet, and "agricola" meaning a farmer (always, in Roman days, male.) "monticola" is evidently analogous with "agricola" and simply means "a chap who lives on a mountain", NOT "a mountain maid". There is no form "agricolus" or "monticolus".

Whether the authors of the Latin language devised these exceptions for the fun of tripping up future generations of schoolboys (as they have often done) I cannot say; but I am sure they would have felt proud to have snared such birds as Ghorpade sandurensis and his two companions.

Thomas Gay.

\* \* \* \* \*

Nesting Material of common Baya (*Ploceus philipinus*). There is a small palm tree near some plantain trees in our riverside colony. It is a regular nesting tree for the Bayas. When they build their nests, they simply fly to the nearest plantain tree, sit on the mid-rib of the leaf, get a strand in their beak, execute a little dance, by which a thin strip is torn off transversely and then fly off to their respective nests.

S.A. mentions strips of paddy leaf and rough edged glasses as the usual materials in his *Book of Indian Birds*.

This may be of interest to others.

M.R. Ray.

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BIRDPWATCHING AT KODAIKANAL PULNEY HILLS.

Rev. A. Navarro, S.J.

During the October 1972 vacations, a friend of mine and myself, both greatly interested in bird-watching spent most of the time at Shembaganur (Kodaikanal), our main purpose being bird-watching in that area. In general, the weather at the southern India hill stations during the month of October is most unpredictable. In fact, during our short stay in Shembaganur, the whole of the Pulney Hills were almost all the time covered with mist and fog. Now and then, there were a few showers with long intervals or spells of drizzling rain. This is, indeed, the most unfavourable condition for pleasant bird-watching. Besides, with these climatic conditions, even the visibility was almost nil.

Since we found it rather boring to remain indoors all day long, being surrounded as we were, on all sides of the settlement by such fine panoramic sights, forests rich with exuberant eucalyptus and at the same time, rich plantations of coffee, bananas and fruit trees, we were very hopeful that at the sightseeing spots, we would witness better spells of favourable weather. So, we ventured into the forest and our hope was often rewarded with some interesting bird-watching sprees.



One of the peculiarities of the local avianfauna of the Pulney Hills is the abundance and variety of Bulbuls. Our collection at St. Xavier's High School Museum includes the following eight varieties of Bulbuls collected precisely from this area.

The Greyheaded Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus priocephalus</i>
The Rubythroated Yellow Bulbul	" <i>melanicterus</i>
The Southern Redwhiskered Bulbul	" <i>jocosus</i>
The Redvented Bulbul	" <i>cafer</i>
The White-browed Bulbul	" <i>luteolus</i>
The South India Black Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes ganeesa</i>
The Yellow-browed Bulbul	" <i>indianus</i>
The Whitecheeked Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus leucogenys</i>

Going on with our travel, we soon discovered that while strolling up and down the main roads and the side roads, there were long stretches of these roads covered with heavy foliage. These, we felt, were ideal spots for birdwatching.

I will first give an account of the large birds we came across as they were relatively very few. Their names are as follows :-

The Malabar Grey-Hornbill, the Red Spur Fowl, the Serpent Eagle, the Malherne's Golden Backed Woodpecker, the Common Pariah Kite, the Molted Wood Owl

and a few Hawks we could not properly identify. With the exception of the Woodpeckers and the Velvetfronted Nuthatches that were seen in pairs, most of the other birds were seen in small flocks of their own species. Such flocks could often be seen fusing together for some time forming large miscellaneous noisy groups. Then they would suddenly disintegrate (break up) and each flock would go its own way. When trying to understand the purpose of such group behaviour, we came to the conclusion that it may have been for the sake of food more than for self protection as the number of predators was very limited. It may also have been that the lack of light because of the long hours of mist, rain and heavy fog, made it not an easy task for the birds to find their food.

We found the most common bird to be the Yellow Bulbuls, the Red-whiskered Bulbuls, the Red-vented Bulbuls, the Black Bulbuls, the White Bellied Drongos, the Quaker Babblers, the Scimitar Babblers, the Flycatchers, the White Eyes and the Flower Peckers. The Yellow Bulbuls were almost absent in the foothills but plentiful at the 1300 metres altitude amongst

the middle size trees and bushes combined with creepers. In their behaviour, they were constantly and cheerfully uttering their sharp calls 'Cthick Cthick' repeated two or three times in succession. These have often been associated with Red Whiskered Bulbuls, Quaker Babblers and Ioras. The Black Bulbuls were widely distributed all over the forest from 1300 metres upto the summit of the hills and for the most part, they confined themselves constantly to tall trees. I would consider them to be the best singers amongst the Bulbuls. They were the first birds we could hear early in the morning. Their calls and songs were short and brief but they were, at the same time, so melodious that people thought them to be thrushes' songs.

The White-bellied Drongos were seen in small noisy parties keeping constantly to the taller trees. In the eucalyptus forest some of the oldest trees were on an average 115 feet high and at such a height the white-bellied Drongos could often be found. Throughout the forest the warbling duets of the Scimitar Babbler could be heard rather frequently. They were seen in pairs and seldom associated with other birds. We found the Laughing Thrush of the Pulney Hills moving silently in small flocks among the low bushes and undergrowth in the company of Flycatchers. When taken by surprise they used to flit away to the nearest bush uttering a loud musical shout - calls of three or four notes. At other times, they were seen in pairs following each other with a very low and soft whispering sort of chatter.

We also came across five varieties of flycatchers. The Nilgiri Blue Flycatchers seem to be very shy birds. We saw quite a lot of them along the rivulets and nallas where there was plenty of brush (thickover). They seem to have a preference for shady spots and now and then they were heard to utter soft 'tick tick' calls. We also chanced to surprise the little beautiful Black and Orange Flycatcher on several occasions near nallas and pretty shady spots. These two flycatchers were seldom seen associating with other birds. The Grey-headed Flycatcher was the most commonly seen of the flycatchers. It could be seen and heard everywhere. It often mixed with other parties of small birds. Sometimes, it was alone but even so, it was always on the wing cheerfully singing its songs and calls that were long, loud and pleasant. A few of these flycatchers were seen at the foothills but most of them were found about 1500 metres high and even upto the summit of Kodalkanal City. They are essentially forest birds, nevertheless their location within the same environment changes slightly. The Grey-headed Flycatcher is usually seen flying from branch to branch throughout the foliage of tall trees and creepers. The Black and Orange Flycatchers are more often seen amongst the thick undergrowth along the ground. The Nilgiri Blue Flycatchers' position seems to be about half way between the Grey Headed and the Black and Orange Flycatchers. The Spotted Fantail Flycatcher was located on the foothills and lower elevations. Once only did we see the Paradise Flycatchers at 1600 metres' altitude flying through the eucalyptus forest.

The White Eyes, the Flower Peckers and Orange Minivets are all arboreal birds. We saw them at the lower altitudes but we noticed they were more abundant at a higher altitude. Flocks of White Eyes seem to be found in all types of forest; they keep constantly on the move with their monotonous call of Chee-chee-chee. They become more noisy late in the evenings. The Nilgiri Flower Peckers, like the White Eyes, were constantly flying, sometimes in pairs, at other times singly, from tree to tree with their incessant typical calls. The Orange Minivets were seen in small flocks constantly moving from tree to tree, not like the White Eyes flying - the whole flock together - but more like the seven sisters following each other at very short intervals. They were often found associating with Bulbuls, White Eyes and Sunbirds. We never saw a Green Barbet though we were curious enough to follow them when we heard the echoes of his calls across the nearest hills and ravines. They were heard systematically about three times a day, morning, noon and late in the evening. Rarely did we see the Whistling Thrush. At most we saw it on three occasions at 2000 metres altitude and once at the foothills with the White-throated Ground Thrush.

On the open grounds, fruit orchards and coffee and banana plantations the following birds were observed. The Rufous Backed Shrike was seen conspicuously perching on top of tall bushes or half dry branches. Now and then it was heard uttering its typical harsh calls. Small flocks of jungle Mynas and Rose-ringed Parakeets were seen near villages and settlements. The Yellow and Grey Wagtails were seen along the roads and open patches of grass. By the side roads and embankments, we observed the Indian Robins, a few Pied Bush Chats and Magpie Robins. On just a few occasions we found the Seven Sisters in the forest. At times, the parties were (group was) on the move hopping through the undergrowth and uttering a very soft and low squeaking call; at other times, they were seen silently crossing the open roads.

In the College (Shembaganur) garden, the Spotted Munia were building their nests at the top of a casuarine about thirty feet from the ground. As we had time to notice (observe) their work in progress, we noticed that the material collected for the purpose was not carried in a single flight from ground to nest but by stages. First the munias were stopping at the lower branches and then with a short flight moved to a higher branch. The whole process of reaching the nest was being done by four or five shiftings from branch to branch until they reached their nests.

A few pairs of Nilgiri Swallows were constantly entering the College compounds and flying freely along the open galleries sometimes perching for a long time on a few old nests; at other times they were resting at suitable places but nevertheless they were most unconcerned about the people going about this way and that.



Not every day but often in the evenings we could see flocks of Striated Swallows on the open ravines facing the plains. They were silently hawking back and forth for insects. At the foot-hills we noticed small colonies of Crested Swifts resting along the electric wires at the entrance of a thick patch of forest.

Thus far goes our experience on this outing.

\* \* \* \*

#### SOME DIVERSE OBSERVATIONS.

Ananta Mitra.

I. A team of IUCN came to Calcutta in November, 1969. The members inspected the Salt Lake area near Calcutta and approved the State Government's scheme to set up a bird sanctuary in a portion of the great swamp. Naturalists of the country are eagerly awaiting the implementation of the Scheme.

On 17.12.1972 myself and my Senior Sri P.K. Sen Gupta had been observing birds in the Southern region of the Swamp in Notun Dera.

The bird-population was rather poor that year. Purple Moorhen (Porphyrio porphyrio), Red Wattled Lapwing (Vanellus indicus), and Common Snipes (Capella gallinago) were in numbers. Other birds were Purple Heron (Ardea purpurea), Black-headed Shrike (Lanius nasutus), Striated Marsh Warbler (Megalurus palustris), etc.

We were moving along the elevated pathways dividing the swamp. From a distance my Senior sighted a white bird on the top of a tall Inga Dulcis tree. We cautiously approached the perch and were delighted to identify it as a Black-winged Kite (Elanus caeruleus). We wish to record that in course of our observation in this area for the last 10 years, this species had never been sighted previously or afterwards by us.

On our way back we encountered the Pallas Fishing Eagle (Haliaeetus leucoryphus). A pair had taken up residence in a large Samanea Saman tree overlooking the swamp with dazzling big eyes and curved beaks they were majestic.

II. On 25.2.1973 both of us visited Pathtola garden about 25 km South of Calcutta. The spring had just set in. The wild clerodendron and citrus flowers with their sweet fragrance were in bloom. There were bird-calls and songs from all directions. The most striking songs were from the Magpie Robin (Copsychus saularis). They seemed to be in raptures. I followed one male



Robin for about fifteen minutes and noted three sets of melodies from him. From a perch in a Jambul tree he was untiringly repeating one or other of the following notes:-

- a) Bollic - Chik-Chik-Chik-Chik - Huik.
- b) Tulli - Tulli - Tulli - Chiktulli - Chiktulli -  
Chiktulli - Ichui - Bichichu - Cichichu - Ich.
- c) Hoinch - Hoinch - I-I-I - Itu - Itu - Itu - Tutui - Tutui.

I had never before encountered such a phenomenon. The notes might be songs or mimories.

III. In the very garden on 13.1.1974 I came across a number of Black-naped Blue Flycatchers (Monarcha azurea).

They were in a playful mood with lively short calls and fanning of tails. There was a shallow ditch with motionless water just below a mango grove. My attention was drawn by a sharp sound of a bird diving into that water. I thought it to be a Common Kingfisher. But to my surprise I found that two Monarcha azureas were taking their dips in the water. It was an amusing sight. They were alternately making their sallies into the water from a branch about 8 feet high. The birds were just dipping in and emerging back in the same line on to the perch. As the one was snaking off the water from the wings the other took the plunge. I started at my watch and noted six such dives at an interval of every half minute.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### SOME FIELD CHARACTERISTICS OF BIRDS.

T.V. Jose. -

It appears certain ways of life are peculiar to some species of birds. Rock pigeons (Columba livia), as common as they are (in Bombay), are found frequently fighting each other doggedly on flat surfaces like roof tops. Yet I have never seen one attacking another when they are in flight. Curiously enough, sometimes I have had occasion to see a small bird like house sparrow (Passer domesticus), not a better flier, attacking a flying rock pigeon, the latter being apparently unable to fight back speeds up to get away from the tiny one. What lacks in rock pigeons when they are on wing needs some explanation inasmuch as their flight for all appearance is well-directed and forceful. Drongos, wagtails and many others strictly fight on wings. In the case of crows and house sparrows this discrimination is absent; they are found fighting in both the situations.

Mode of fighting also differs in the case of certain birds. Rock pigeons employ their wings to beat and push back their opponents. Other birds also seem to have their own peculiarities.

Once I found a golden oriol drenching itself by flying through wet clusters of leaves of a Pongam tree. At the same time in the same tree a copper-smith bird (Megalaima haemacephala) chose to creep through these clusters of leaves to achieve the same end. Last year, at Trichur, I saw a small bird of bul-bul's size dropping into shallow and slow-flowing waters of a sweep-irrigation-duct in a garden. It immediately flew back to a branch of a tree to shake, preen and drop again. On my appearance, it flew away and I could not identify the bird.

I feel these field characteristics are as helpful marks as size, shape and colour of a particular bird in identifying it. I wonder then why they are not incorporated into our field guides to identify birds in the field.

\* \* \* \* \*

[Field guides have to be limited in size. -Ed.]

.....

#### EDITORIAL:

In the last issue of the "Newsletter" I had expressed doubts regarding the accuracy of Mr. Winston Creado's observations on the Pied Myna.

I must eat back my words and apologise to Mr. Creado.

On the 7th of July I had parked my car against a gap in the North boundary wall of Santa Cruz Airport. From this position of vantage a group of us observed a pair of Pied Mynas feeding beyond a dump of water Hyacinths. Every few minutes when one of them secured a grass hopper they flew one behind the other to some place, which I could not see, and returned.

There were two possibilities. One was that they were nesting nearby and were taking the insects to feed their young. The other possibility was that they just took the insects to a hard surface like a roof top to batter the prey and arrange the morsel properly prior to swallowing.

\* \* \*

Contributors of articles and notes are reminded that every contribution is appreciated. Sometimes the editor has to wait for the right season to publish the article. For instance, there would be point in publishing a lengthy description of Winter visitors in the Summer numbers. Also an attempt has to be made to have a suitable mix or variety to make each issue as interesting as possible.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### CORRESPONDENCE

As desired in Editor's comments on my note in Vol.14 (6), the clarifications are as follows :-

As stated, Pusa Instt. campus is surrounded on all sides by fairly thickly populated localities of Patel Nagar i.e. East, West and South and Rajit Nagar (on NE of Instt.); Inderpuri & Naraina (on S) and Rajinder Nagar: old and New and National Physical Laboratory complex with its colony (on W). Only on one side of this Instt. some open area of ridge are present. Obviously to these species: resources of food, roosting and nesting are available more within this campus (of Instt.) than outside. Naturally these factors lead to what is termed as 'habitat preference' and hence (as put in the last para of the note) "it appears that urbanisation has caused concentration of these birds in this campus".

Incidentally it may be pointed out that if we attempt and collect information as suggested by Dr. Salim Ali in 'an appeal' (July, 1973 issue) and compare the information with some adjoining area we might reach the same inference, i.e. concentration in open areas affording habitat preference to these species.

As suggested, I am intending and am planning out the work to take up the study as a project. I shall be happy if some one could give an address from where I can get coloured rings here for the study.

Observations on associated biota have deep significance in such ecological studies. Because often along with crops in neighbouring areas woods grow. These not only afford food to birds in times when fields are barren but have also been shown in certain cases to harbour insect larvae or adults and serve as alternative host to pests. Hence these also need control. Here too and incidentally it may be pointed out that on Indian bird species practically insignificant information is available on feeding habits on wild plants etc. and feeding on alternative foods, because in no place preferred food is available all the year around. Also the association of prey (insect larvae & pest) with associated biota further deserve attention. On this aspect particularly of predation:



its basic and subsidiary components) perhaps to date no study on any Indian bird species is available deserving a status of comprehensive reference guide etc. In fact we younger people should take up some of these studies needing somewhat vigorous field work.

R.K. Bhatnagar.

\* \* \* \*

For many years in our garden at Andheri there used to be a Babul tree on which a pair of Purplerumped Sunbirds spent the night. Every morning when we had our "bed tea" in the Verandah these birds woke up and entertained us with a very pleasant song and dance. I recall that the performance started punctually at a particular time.

In the evenings, a group of Night Herons flew over our house westward towards Juhu with loud kwaark kwaark calls. In this case too, day after day they went punctually at the same time.

The Koels - the noisiest of birds - started calling early morning soon after 5.00 a.m. in certain months of the year, and if I had been a careful observer I might have been able to confirm the exact time of the occurrence of these calls.

Lavkumar's appeal for Chilka has not been in vain for the Government of Orissa have in fact established a Committee to ensure that the Lake is well preserved, and that any development around borders of the Lake do not interfere with the ecology of this unique wetland. The Naval Boys Training Establishment which is being put up at the southern end of Chilka Lake will of course be an intrusion, but the Navy has given firm assurances about not causing any disturbance to the waterfowl, and they have in fact offered to act as guardians of the entire region so that poaching and damage to the habitat in any form is eliminated.

Incidentally, during a recent visit to Bhubaneswar in June I was struck by the large number of birds in this new capital of Orissa, and to see how tame they were and how unconcerned with the human population of the town unfortunately established in an area which had been a Reserved forest for so many decades. There were free pies right in the middle of the city, and saw an interesting romance in progress between three birds. I imagined that two of them were males having an argument over a female. From time to time male and female flew away to be followed by a disgruntled suitor who did not give up easily and continued to be a nuisance for the half-hour that I was watching this drama.

The other birds readily seen in Bhubaneswar were: Pied Mynas (several of them in the process of making their nests, and flying around with nesting material trailing from their beaks); Copper-smith; Common Bee-eaters; Common Mynas; Roseringed Parakeets; Ashy-wren Warbler; Tailor Birds; Redvented Bulbul; Indian Robin; Blackheaded Oriole; Grey Partridge; Golden-backed Woodpecker; Whitebreasted Kingfisher and several more, Paradise Flycatcher, Blackbellied Finch lark and Common Ioras. I had a beautiful sight of a Pied Kingfisher in Konarak. I would have liked to see more of the birds in the neighbourhood of this famous monument, but found the erotic sculpture of this architectural master-piece a strong competitor.

Zafar Futehally.

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# NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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BIRDPWATCHING IN GARHWAL.

S.R. Shah.

In May, 1874, W. EDWIN BROOKS (STRAY FEATHERS 1875) did a purely ornithological exploration from Tehri to Gangotri (Tehri Garhwal). He followed the pilgrim route from Tehri and strayed very little into uninhabited areas. In those days there were no roads and buses even upto Hardwar or Rishikesh. He had no alternative to walking or riding. Man had not started cutting down forests for paper pulp, sleepers, or to bring them under cultivation. Yet he speaks of wanton cutting down of trees. "This is the sort of destruction to be regretted for the valley will never be again the lovely place it once was". He shot and collected birds. He enumerates 168 species.

A.E. OSMASTON who was a dedicated ornithologist besides being a Forest Officer in Garhwal between 1910 and 1920, wrote a short note on birds of Garhwal in 1921 - BNHS Journal VOL. 28. He described - I like the way he does it - 110 species with interesting details.

In May-June 1955 Shri Devkumar in a harmonious combination of ornithology and mountaineering started trekking from Chamoli (C. 3,300') trekked to Tungnath, Kedarnath, Badrinath and high altitude region (18,000') of Dhaul Ganga, Amrit Ganga and

Grithi Ganga - the breeding grounds of quite a number of species. He describes 135 species in B.N.H.S. Journal Vol. 53. He also laments the desolation surrounding the pilgrim route. The hacked barren mountain sides, ridges, spurs move him deeply.

In October 1973 we (wife and myself) amateur bird watchers - out simply for pleasures of bird watching and trekking - walked about 200 miles in middle altitudes (6,000' to 12,000') in Gangotri, Kedarnath, Tungnath, Badrinath region. We expected spots like Kush Kalyan (12,000') Nehasar Tal (9,000'), Madmaheshwar (9,000'), Panwali (11,000'), Devria (8,500'), Tungnath, to be rich in bird life and scenic beauty. Actually they turned out to be poor in bird life (at this time of the year) - but extraordinary rich in scenic beauty. We saw only 31 species. We happened to see Black-naped Green Woodpecker which does not figure in the list of Brooks, Osmaston and Lavkumar.

In 1964 we visited the whole of Brooks area. We carried the impression that inspite of cutting down of trees, the surrounding hills appeared green and conveyed the feeling that we were in a "after all not a bad Jungle". In 1973 this very area devastated that it was as barren as the hills of Maharashtra - to name a few Avanth-patta, Kalsubai, Ratangadh, Hareeshchandragadh.

Only inner, higher ridges and mountains where it was impossible to transport logs by streams, had dense evergreen forests. In Tungnath region we had seen terraced fields upto 6,000' in 1964. Now we saw terraced fields upto 9,300' in 1973. Since our route was far away from human habitation (a tiny village after every 25 miles), we hoped to see a number of birds in the dense forests and alps. We saw very few birds and conjectured that either the altitudinal migration had not begun or it was completely over and the birds had reached the plains. Compared to more than a dozen similar treks in Himalayas, this time the pattern of our sighting the birds was unusual. In the past we would daily see nearly a dozen species between 6 a.m. and 8 a.m. and one at least every half an hour on an average. This time on 15 days out of 30 we did not see even one bird. On 3 days we saw flocks - Black-capped Sibilas (75 to 80), Scarlet Minivets (13 males & 2 females), Slatyheaded Parakeets (about 300 in each of the three flocks), Whitethroated Laughing Thrushes (about 100) and no other bird. The rest of the days two or three birds a day. Panwali showed a wild boar, a muskdeer and a Griffon Vulture.

At Gaurikund on the Mandakini river, the Plumbeous Redstart who "maintains jealously guarded territories in winter, demonstrating aggressively against intruders of its own kind while tolerating other species, e.g. Whitecapped Redstart and Forktails etc." seemed to be reconciled to trespassing by 3 other Plumbeous Redstarts, 2 Whitecapped Redstarts, 3 Spotted Forktails, 4 Brown Dippers and 2 Whitebreasted Dippers just opposite to Kali Kamliwada Dharamshala where a sulphur hot



spring meets Mandakini waters. Could hot water and the resultant swarms of insects be the reason?

Longtailed Sibia - "the curious blend of treepie, Drongo and Fantail Flycatcher" - was seen at 8,500' on the way to Devriā Tal a place outside the distributional range - both geographically and altitudinally - mentioned in the Hand book. The same was the case with Whitetailed Blue Robin (two inner stripes in the tail, white) being far west of central Nepal. Considering winter period (Oct. 7), both the Blue Magpies were seen in a higher altitudinal zone - the Yellowbilled at 9,000' and the Redbilled at 6,300'. We saw a White Wagtail at 8,500' hunting insects in a flycatcher manner in company with a Whitecapped Redstart at a deserted cowherd settlement (GHIANNI) far away from a stream. The Himalayan Whistling Thrush seemed to be partial to human habitation at Pinswar. We did not see any along a torrential boulder strewn stream 2 miles away in just the opposite hill with a couple of wooded nullahs and with no human habitation. We saw a pair of Large Brown Thrushes at Bhairavghati much after sunset in dimlight, grazing in tree-fringed alp at 8,000' ! The other birds were Bartailed Cuckoo Dove, Rufous Turtle Dove, Speckled Wood Pigeon, Velvetfronted Nuthatch, Browncrested Tit, Whitecollared Blackbird, Stripethroated Yuhina, Yellowbellied Fantail Flycatcher, Monal and Rufous-tailed Flycatcher. A party of seven Whitecrested Laughing Thrushes were climbing up a foot track noiselessly like a gang of raiders going on a raid. Yellowbilled birds seem to belong to higher altitudes compared to Redbilled ones, as we saw a Yellowbilled Chough at 11,500' at TALI near Panwali and five hours later a Redbilled one at Maggu at 9,000'.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### NOTES ON SOME BIRDS SEEN IN SOUTH DEVON, ENGLAND

D.A. Stairmand.

For the past two years I have lived and worked in the lovely countryside of the southernmost part of Devon - which is in the West Country of England and very rightly popular as a holiday area.

I have just received my copy of the Newsletter April issue (Vol. XIV No. 4) and read the poetic, nostalgic - and always thoroughly enjoyable - Iavkumar's "Birdwatching in England from an armchair in India". In the last two lines of that piece he prompts me to write about some of the birds here. As a base for my notes I shall touch on some of the birds mentioned by Iavkumar. Readers may observe that one thing I have in common with Iavkumar is a pre-  
amble.

To set the scene a little I would say that the grounds comprising my present business and home extend to about three acres and consist of an hotel, cottage, outbuildings, a large lawn and some magnificent old trees of which several oaks and a Copper Beech are outstanding. We are set in a Coombe (that is a steep-sided valley) and surrounded by grazing meadows (sheep and cattle) and some wooded areas.

I think that I can safely start with January on Lavkumar's calendar. The English Robin is one of the tamest birds we have. When digging up ground with a spade in the garden it is quite usual to have a Robin following behind taking advantage of any exposed worms or grubs. Juvenile birds are beautifully speckled and tame enough to appear in the kitchen perching on equipment - including kettles and stoves - if one has neglected to give them their due ration of cake or bread crumbs. At this time of the year adult robins tend to become worn with the exertions of parenthood but in late autumn and winter they re-stake their territories and are resplendent again and this is when the blue to the side of their wings really sets off the red breast.

We are very lucky to have nesting Tawny Owls in the garden and this year three juvenile birds have been raised. They appear in any one of our three coniferous trees or on the roof-top of our neighbour's house, vociferously wheezing for food from the adults - who themselves are fairly quiet during summer, but winter nights echo to the female's sharp "Too-whit" and the male's instant long drawn reply "To-whoo-oo". It is lovely to see these owls sitting in a branch of a tree looking down at one like a disapproving great-aunt. For their food there are voles, mice, shrews etc. in the garden and I have come across the odd dead blackbird or wood pigeon and can guess at the hunter.

Charms of goldfinches appear on the lawn or in one of our side gardens - particularly when groundsel or thistle abounds. I went on a walk nearby on Christmas day - it was a crisp day full of sunshine and blue sky and watched some 100 + Goldfinches gleaning food from a field. The sun was behind me and shone fully on the birds reds and golds and it was a glorious sight.

We get our fresh strawberries and raspberries from a charming young couple who have a few acres of land outside Slapton - some four miles from here. There was a hoopoe there about two weeks ago and that bird's appearance creates great excitement in this part of the world. How common they were in India - whether waddling around the sight-seeing spots of Delhi or near the banks of glorious rushing rivers in Kashmir. The rareness of a certain species in a particular area governs one's excitement to a large extent. Here Buzzards are fairly common place but I did not see one in India - if I had the thrill would have remained with me for many years.



One of the commonest birds seen on or above the high hedgerows of our narrow lanes is the Yellowhammer with all the charm of buntings of India. Yellowhammers often sing from telegraph posts and wires and present a charming picture in sunlight.

Winter is a hard time for tits and it is then that we put out nuts for them so that they do not perish in the cold. Then we could view their comings and goings all day as they cling acrobatically for food within the wire baskets. Great Tits are the most handsome with their black on heads, olive-green backs and yellow below. Blue Tits are even more numerous (they were a close second to the Robin as our National bird) and are pretty in their light blue and yellow. Coal Tits are mainly dingy in colour but have a black cap with a "parting" at the back. (The parting is really a blob of white on the nape). Marsh Tits are even drabber - a black cap but no "parting" but are tiny, cheerful and so lively and altogether delightful in their own way.

I cannot leave without saying that Common Swallows have successfully nested in two out-houses and the nestlings heads appear above the nests on my approach. Soon they will leave their nests but fly for only short periods to begin with. Mainly they will be sitting up among the rafters looking like a clutch of young owls. This morning a Jay - of the gorgeous blue in the wings - ventured on a pig sty roof (the shed has been devoid of pigs for many a year) fairly close to one lot of nestling swallows but was dive-bombed with absolute ferocity by the adult swallows. It was amusing to see the Jay duck under the Swallows lightning jabs to the head much as a prize-fighter would do. I added my weight to the swallows and the intruder was sent scurrying with half a dozen swallows in hot pursuit. I am delighted to feed the lovely Jays - but in winter and on non-living scraps.

When we moved here we painted the outside of the hotel and in the process existing House Martins nests had to come down. Now - day by day - some ten House Martins are collecting wet mud and using their saliva to build afresh. These are lovely birds - cheeky, glossy blue above and they have a white rump which must make a good guide line to following birds on their mass migration to Africa in late Autumn. The other morning on ground below my Cottage window I thought some House Martins were having a bad-tempered fight. I soon saw I was so wrong - they were mating as I realised when I saw a male covering a female. One male got so excited that he forgot to fly and instead stomped very bandily legged across the ground to a female who was .....very innocently caught by surprise? Or so she made out.

\* \* \* \*



## ON BREVITY IN BIRD NAMES AND THE SUB-SPECIES PROBLEM

Kumar D. Ghorpade.

I offer no apology for exhuming this long buried controversy which appeared in the Newsletter over three years ago. The subject of brevity in bird names greatly interested me at the time and has continued to engage my attention ever since. I have therefore attempted to give my views on this subject and have tried to bring common sense and practicality to bear on the problem.

Mr. Gauntlett started off the debate [Newsletter 10(10): 6 et seq.] by remarking in his article on "Birds in a Bengal Garden" that the name 'Green Parakeet' should be adopted for what was called the 'Roseringed Parakeet' since he felt the latter name was 'long-winded'. At this point I ask whether 'Roseringed' is really very much longer to say or write than 'Green' and since all Indian parakeets are to some extent mainly green, I question the credibility of this view.

In Mr. Stairmand's reply he rightly pointed out that 'Green' was rather vague and that 'Roseringed' was fairly well established in Indian bird literature. But then he erred when he elaborated on the name of another bird, Neophron percnopterus. Instead of directly supplying his views on the name of this species, variously called "Egyptian Vulture, White Scavenger Vulture, Neophron and Pharoah's Chicken", he introduced a new factor into the controversy — that of the sub-species. He explained that the INDIAN HANDBOOK calls N.p.percnopterus the Egyptian Vulture and N.p. ginginianus the Indian Scavenger Vulture. He then suggested that Mr. Gauntlett probably saw the latter judging the locality but advocated that the name Neophron be adopted if its races were to be disregarded.

I personally believe that giving 'common' names to sub-species is impractical and superfluous since they are arbitrary divisions of species and are normally indistinguishable in the field. Ornithology is one of the few branches of zoology where common names have had such wide usage especially in semi-popular and popular literature. The reason for their introduction was perhaps to replace the odd-sounding and difficult (not in reality though) scientific or 'latin' names. So long as such common names were short and uniformly used, they were of significant value. But when some of them like 'Himalayan Goldenbacked Threetoed Woodpecker', for instance, were proposed or when a single species was called by various names as in the example of the Egyptian Vulture quoted above, their practicality became questionable. To remedy this, in countries like England, the local ornithological body formulated standard lists of common names of each species which were advocated for general use. In the absence of

such a standard list for Indian birds I propose that we use, for the present, the names suggested by Dr. Ripley in his SYNOPSIS. In this work, Dr. Ripley gives a common name for each species only and not for every subspecies as in the INDIAN HANDBOOK. However, there are certain difficulties with some of the common names used in the SYNOPSIS. Some species have been given two alternative names like 'Black or Pondicherry Vulture' and 'Egyptian or Scavenger Vulture'. In such cases I propose that the first mentioned name be used and the second discarded. Again, there are some fairly ungainly and 'longwinded' names such as 'Himalayan Goldenbacked Threetoed Woodpecker' and 'Little Scalybellied Green Woodpecker'. In these cases I suggest either shortening of these names to three words or changing them altogether to a more descriptive name which does not sound similar to allied species like 'Indian Goldenbacked Threetoed Woodpecker' and 'Scalybellied Green Woodpecker'. But until such amendments are made officially it would be advisable for everyone using common names of Indian bird species to adhere strictly to the names given in the SYNOPSIS which would go a long way in stabilizing such nomenclature. Using this principle, Psittacula krameri should be called 'Roseringed Parakeet' and Neophron percnopterus 'Egyptian Vulture'.

A further suggestion I would like to make is that contributors to the Newsletter and other scientific publications must give both the common name as well as the scientific name of every species at the first mention of these in the article or note. Subsequently only the common name could be used to refer to it. In any case, whether common names are used or not, the correct scientific name of the bird species should be given in all contributions. Some sort of scientific 'discipline' has to be observed if common names are to serve any useful purpose as displacement names for scientific nomenclature. The only solution to controversies such as the one under discussion would be to adhere strictly to a 'standard list' whatever one's personal preferences are. Such an arrangement would, I believe, be foolproof and a workable proposition.

Mr. Gauntlett, in his reply to Mr. Stairmand, gives a very intelligent assessment of the sub-species problem with which I fully agree. I was rather surprised, therefore, to find him critical of the labours of Ph.D. scholars trying to tackle problems in bird systematics. This view is voiced by so many people who very evidently have a limited comprehension of, and unsympathetic attitude to, the science of Taxonomy, that I would have liked to appraise them of the importance of such systematic work and of the unreasonable lack of understanding that non-taxonomists have hitherto shown in such work. Suffice it for me to point out here that if only one cared to note that for every change of name that has had to be advocated (not without sufficient grounds in the majority of cases) there exist at least 10 times as many names which have remained stable and unaltered, the current disenchantment with taxonomic research would be seen as largely uncalled-for and unjust. In ornithology especially, taxonomic research (both in nomenclature and



in the classification of the lower taxa) is almost complete and this is all the more reason why such allegations have no validity now.

However, Mr. Gauntlett goes on to present a very balanced and practical view of the utility of the sub-species category. He rightly states — "I think it was unfortunate to use this treatment of giving common names to sub-species in the INDIAN HANDBOOK because it obscures the very real difference in taxonomic value between species and sub-species. A species is a biological entity but a sub-species is not." It was indeed inexpedient of the INDIAN HANDBOOK (rather, of its authors) to give so much importance to the sub-species, especially at a time when the trend is away from an exaggerated importance to this category and towards a new realization of the real value of the biological species. It is to create an awareness of the impracticality of the sub-species category and thus to negate any harmful concept created by the INDIAN HANDBOOK among ornithologists in this country that this article is hopefully submitted.

The sub-species category was initially created because slight variations in colour, size, etc., in different populations of the same species distributed over a wide area were utilized by some opportunistic systematists to propose 'new' species and claim authorship for them. The number of such 'species' grew so rapidly that the species category as such was in danger of losing its value and something had to be done to remedy this. Thus it was that a new infra-specific category — the sub-species — was created primarily to absorb these excessive 'species' and still retain the names to the 'credit' of the original author but also to designate and recognise certain populations within the species which differed in some constant morphological character from the rest and in addition occupied a geographical sub-division of the range of that species. It was perhaps unfortunate that sub-species were given nomenclatorial validity and I feel it is precisely because of this one factor that so much confusion has resulted owing to an accumulation of a host of sub-specific names proposed for supposedly distinct populations of a single species by taxonomists with a tendency to 'split' species. It would have been better if dubious specific names were synonymized under the valid species name rather than have it retained as a sub-specific name. A host of specific synonyms (which have no taxonomic standing) under each valid species would have been less troublesome than to have a number of sub-specific names (which have taxonomic standing).

A species being a biological entity does undergo some amount of variation over various parts of its range owing to climatic, ecological, genetic and other factors. Accordingly, some populations of the wide-spread species, especially those at the two extreme ends of its range, may diverge in time, quite considerably from each other so much so as to be even reproductively incompatible when brought together artificially for the first time. As an example, a pan-Himalayan species



which extends from Kashmir to Arunachal Pradesh may have very different looking populations at the two extreme ends of its ranges. In addition, the intervening population between these two areas may show gradual variation in one or more characters and link up the two extreme varieties of the species. In such cases, delimitation of sub-species becomes very difficult and impractical. In my opinion the best solution would be not to recognize any sub-species at all, but to give a detailed account of the variation of the different populations and their geographic extent. Probably the most desirable recognition of sub-species would be in those species whose populations are separated by some geographical or ecological barriers. Examples would be sub-species of the same species in southern India and Ceylon in one case and in the Western Ghats and the Himalaya or Assam in another. Again, only in strictly resident populations of such species could sub-species be usefully recognized -- it is implied here that such populations have ceased to be in contact with each other and therefore have started to diverge from each other both internally (genetically) and externally (in structure). The INDIAN HANDBOOK by recognizing so many sub-species of certainly questionable validity has set an unfortunate precedent, which, I hope, will be partly offset by the views presented in this article.

It is here that the attention of the reader is drawn to the fact that the sub-species generally fulfils no useful purpose besides unjustifiably exaggerating the fact that the species is variable (no wonder since it is a dynamic unit, not a static one) and hence should not be given too much importance in the writings of the field ornithologist, for whom such aspects as the behaviour, nesting, habitat, distribution, ecology, etc. of bird species as a whole should be more relevant and useful.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### EDITORIAL:

Once again Sholapur District has had a poor monsoon. Although this is an oft repeated feature, little seems to have been done to block the water courses with small dams to create large ponds, as done in nearby States where tank irrigation is very prevalent.

Drought-hit refugees fleeing from Sholapur are complaining about the unprecedented increase in rat population ~~making~~ menacing proportions. This could have happened only by people themselves providing the conditions suitable for rats and mice to flourish. Not only that but most natural enemies of the rats have been killed or dishoused. These predators are mammals, birds and reptiles which generally live in the natural hollows of old trees or in hollow spaces below the roots of large trees, with the exception of roadside trees, which suffer from vehicular noise and pollution. Very

few old trees are left to accommodate the nocturnal predators which keep down the rat population.

Fortunately, the Barn Owl (Tyto alba) is able to nest in man made buildings. The other owls, all magnificent rat and mice killers, have not adapted themselves to nesting in outhouses and buildings.

In any case the superstitions who constitute the vast majority of our people consider all owls as birds of ill omen and kill the birds if given a chance. The same fate is meted out to jackals, rat snakes and a host of creatures as we do not know our friends from our foes.

So we watch with frustration as year by year a further step is taken in converting green woods and fertile lands into dry barrenness where an emaciated people will compete with rats and cockroaches.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### CORRESPONDENCE:

During your stay in Bangalore I wish you will visit Ranganithitoo. This place is hardly 12 miles from Mysore. This Bird Sanctuary abounds in Spoon-bills, White-ibis, Cormorants, Egrets and so many other birds. Next time when you visit Bangalore don't forget to go to Ranganithitoo which I am sure you will like.

Gopal N. Dabade.

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# NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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THE ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOUR OF THE PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD.

Bro. A. Navarro, S.J.

On the 15th of April one of our students brought to my office a nest of the Purplerumped Sunbird containing two fresh eggs, from our neighbour's compound. It is not the first time that the nest of this little sunbird has been found in this area and often I have seen the Purplerumped Sunbird breeding in our school compound. But I have always admired the selection of materials these Sunbirds have adapted for the construction of their nests.

The reason why these little sunbirds have stayed till today in this area, that comprises the Cruick-shank Road at present Mahapalika Marg and Gymkhana Road including the School of Arts compound, Police Offices building, Cama Hospital, St. Xavier's College and St. Xavier's High School compounds, is the existence of patches of garden and mainly a large number and variety of trees and bushes; certainly the most suitable environment for the Purplerumped Sunbirds to prosper.

The location where the nest should be attached, the shape and diversity of materials the Sunbird has used for the building of the nest are hereditary factors within the birds nature. The fluctuation of birds population in certain areas may depend on many factors.

Anyhow I have no hesitation in placing the Purplerumped Sunbird as one of the Common birds of Bombay City along with the Tailor bird, the Copper Smith and some others; as long as we keep constantly trimming our gardens and there is an abundance of trees on our roads and avenues the Purplerumped Sunbird will remain always with us.

At a distance the nest of the Purplerumped Sunbird looks more like a wind blown collection of odds and ends caught together. The nest is pear shaped in construction. The main body is built with plant fibres and bound together with spiders webs and cobwebs; the end of the nest is extended with loose trails of fibre with a few leaves and cobwebs. The whole affair is a marvellous piece of camouflage usually suspended from a creeper or attached to the end of a thin branch between 5 to 6 metres from the ground. The entrance is always on the upper part with a porch partially concealing the entrance. The interior is smoothly covered with a fine silky material.

Examining the nest carefully I found that all the material used to bind the main body of the nest which normally is done with spider's webs and cobwebs has been substituted by all kinds of thin bits of thread and bits of paper of whitish shade, the edges of these bits of paper are not torn out straight. We may surmise that all these materials have been left on the ground for some time and due to the action of the weather the tit-bits of paper and thread have lost their shine and brightness taking on the appearance of wasted material without definite shape or form.

As the Purplerumped Sunbird is arboreal in its habits and feeds on nectar and minute insects very rarely will the Sunbird descend to the ground.

These two facts, the way how these bits of papers and thread have been gathered and the purpose why these materials have been selected, i.e. the departure from their stereotyped behaviour constitutes a remarkable example of adaptation.

Many of the lost (extinct) creatures of bygone years were lost because they were not able to adapt themselves to the new types of ecology that suddenly or gradually came upon them.

The nest is the receptacle where the eggs have to be deposited for the time of the incubation; it is also a security enclosure for the rearing of the chicks; at the same time it has to give to the parent birds a large margin of concealment and security. The Purplerumped Sunbird gets all these safety measures by the addition of these tit-bits of paper and thread doing what in our days is known as camouflage. By these means they render their nest invisible to predators.



The final conclusion can be that the nest of the Purplerumped Sunbird without these oddments - true real spider webs - by replacements or substitutes, will not be the nest of the Purplerumped Sunbird.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### UNUSUAL NESTING BY RED WATTLED LAPWING

V.S. Saxena, Dy. Conservator of Forests, Jaipur (Rajasthan).

Red Wattled Lapwing (Vanellus indicus, Boddaert) is commonly seen sitting, walking or running on the ground only. It avoids perching on the bushes or branches of the trees, nor in fact, its feet are equipped for this. It is most unusual to see this bird sitting on parapet walls, roofs and buildings.

A pair of Red Wattled Lapwing has been arousing my interest since the 8th June 1972, the first time I saw the couple sitting on the roof of my garage in Bharatpur. The roof is about 3 metres high from the ground level and the garage is surrounded by waste lands and cultivated fields. A small pond of water also exists at a distance of about 100 metres from the garage.

We had been regularly watching this pair of birds since then and quite often in the company of the dancing Peacock with his harem of three or four peahen (Pavo cristatus, Linn.). Sometimes they were also seen with other birds like the Common Myna (Acridotheres tristis, Linn.), Blue Rock Pigeon (Columba livia, Gmelin.), Ring Dove (Streptopelia decaocto, Frivaldszky.), Little Brown Dove (Streptopelia senegalensis, Linn.), Indian Robin (Saxicola fulicata, Linn.), House Sparrow (Passer domesticus, Linn.) on the roof.

There seemed to be perfect co-existence and mutual understanding between these birds, which were all engaged in courtship these days. However, in the afternoon of 9th July, 1972 when it was cloudy and drizzling, we heard deafening calls of this Did-he-do-it bird with intermittent penetrating alarm calls of the Common Myna. We rushed out in the compound to see if some Bird of Prey was molesting these sweet little ones. We were surprised to notice that the familiar Peacock was intruding in the territory of the Lapwings. Both the Lapwings were near the nest and were hitting the peacock in quick succession at his head and the neck. One of the Lapwings took an aggressive posture by spreading its wings and sitting on the parapet wall. It stooped to attack the peacock on its eyes. The pair of the Common Mynas was also frantically crying and was making efforts to drive away the intruder - the peacock. We disturbed the Peacock and it flew away.

This behaviour of birds was unusual and to satisfy my curiosity, I managed to climb up the roof; it had no staircase. To my astonishment, I found a nest made of pebbles of calcareous nodules, brick pieces, black earthenpot pieces etc. with a diameter of about 10 cms. It had a little depression in the middle in which lying four eggs - greyish brown blotched with black spots and completely merging with the nest and also perfectly camouflaging with the general surroundings on the roof. This was the nest of the Red Wattled Lapwing. It is unusual to expect the nest of this bird on the roof for it nests on the ground only.

This sight certainly did explain my inquisitiveness about the behaviour of the Lapwings but why the Mynas were rescuing the Lapwings exposing themselves to hazards of the attack of the agitated Peacock was still intriguing me. Suddenly, my daughter reading in 6th class drew my attention towards a hole (10 cms x 6 cms) in the brickwall of the compound. Situated at a height of about 1 metre from the ground, it contained three eggs and from the fourth egg a chick was hatching out with its head and body being black and the beak pale yellow. The eggs were dirty white and heavily blotched with blackish brown spots. The nest was a bit oval in shape (6 cms x 4 cms) and it was made of soft grass and rubbish with mixed lining of hair and silk-like threads. Having witnessed the behaviour of Mynas, I thought it should be their nest. By the evening, stood corrected; for in this very nest we saw the female of the Indian Robin incubating the eggs. It then seemed to me that the joint defence of the Lapwings and the Mynas against the peacock was only an expression of good neighbourliness. I could not locate the nest of the Mynas but I am sure there must be one nearby.

On the morning of 9th July 1972 at about 9 a.m. I checked the nest of the Indian Robin and observed that one more egg had hatched out. Since the familiar call "Pity-to-do-it", of the Lapwing was not heard, I sent my servant to see as to what was the matter. He went up the roof and after a little while ruefully submitted that there were no eggs nor were the Lapwings anywhere. It gave me a rude shock and I hurried up to see the circumstances for myself. There were no signs of disturbing the nest and for breakage of any of the eggs; the eggs were certainly missing. I was only guessing if the eggs had been pilfered by the Crow or had the Peacock had swallowed them or that the Lapwing had herself taken them away in her feet to another place of safety!

The Indian Robin too, did not have goodluck for after my return from tour on 16th July 1972 I found that both the chicks were missing, one unhatched egg was lying on the ground and there were no traces of the fourth egg.



It is a common belief in this tract that if the Titodi (Red Wattled Lapwing) lays eggs on a high ground, it would be a good rain year and since this nesting was on appreciably high point, there was the apprehension of floods. Let us wait and watch!

I had written this matter on the 16th July 1972 and was hoping to pass it on to Padmashri Zafar Futehally, Bombay, but somehow or the other it remained with me and on account of my transfer, I packed this in a box. My move from Bharatpur could not materialise due to floods of 12th August 1972. The fury of floods had surpassed all the previous inundations at Bharatpur for over a century. The roof of the garage on which the Lapwing had laid the eggs, was surrounded on all sides by the flood waters and even after the flood waters had receded, the ground around the garage was muddy and unfit for nesting for quite sometime. It is difficult to say, if it was a mere coincidence that the heavy floods in Bharatpur had some relation with the nesting of the Lapwing or if it was an intuition in these Birds that they laid the eggs on the high ground - the roof of the garage which, of course, was not touched by the floods.

In Bharatpur, till the end of July 1972, measures were being planned to combat the problems arising out of drought, but I always, although a little diffidently, talked of getting prepared for floods. I had this motivation only on account of the observation of the unusual nesting of the Lapwing. As ill-luck would have it, the tragedy did befall and Bharatpur had suffered heavily due to these floods. This shows the desirability to observe these and similar birds minutely and see if their peculiar behaviour in a particular year can give us a forewarning of flood, drought or some other calamity.

\* \* \* \*

#### JUNGLE BABBIERS AT PALI HILL, BANDRA, BOMBAY 400 050

Salim Ali.

I have just come upon an old note, dated Pali Hill, May 1924 - when the place was still well-wooded with plenty of birds around. It reads as follows :

"One of a sisterhood of Jungle Babblers (Turdoides somervillei) on some unknown provocation, suddenly pounced on and attacked another member, chasing it furiously on the ground in leaps and bounds over fallen leaves, stones, a low parapet wall and other obstacles. Finally they clinched on a branch about 6 feet above and dropped perpendicularly to the ground in a tangle, gripping each other firmly with the claws and plying bills viciously. While they were so engaged I approached them with my hand to within 6 inches without attracting notice. On sudden realisation of my proximity the



belligerents disengaged and made off to a neighbouring tree, one still chasing the other. They were joined in the squabble by a third individual, and after the two principals had clinched again and dropped to the ground in a knot, as before, the interloper dropped on them like a brick from above, and then there was a terrific triangular melee. The squabbling continued thus for some more time, accompanied not only by the loud shrieks and swearing of the combatants but also by the cheering and jeering of the rest of the sisterhood which crowded round with frowzled plumage like excited spectators at a wrestling match. The combatants disentangled themselves in a few minutes and all three rejoined the flock and resumed hopping about and feeding among the mulch on terms of complete amity! What was this scene?" I am still wondering.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### ALL ON ONE TREE

S.V. Nilakanta.

Last August I had to go to Madras. As the train arrived late in the evening, by the time I was accommodated in my first floor bedroom all the diurnal birds had gone to roost and were not noticeable.

A large banyan tree which was in fruit is situated a few metres from this house where I stayed. The extreme tips of the branches on the south side of this tree actually touch the house.

At 4.30 the next morning I was woken up by the musical and plaintive notes of two Wood Shrikes (Tephrodornis pondicerianus). I went out on the flat terrace adjoining my room and peered out in the dark but could not see these birds. There were a number of fire flies flitting among the branches of the banyan and adjoining neem tree and made me wonder whether the shrikes caught and ate these insects. One bird was down in the garden and the other in the tree. They kept their distance and never interrupted each others song. One bird would call out from the tree and the other would follow from the bush but never the two together. This was kept up till daylight.

My attempt to go back to sleep was rudely shaken by a flock of Koels (Eudynamis scolopaceus) which made their noisy entry crying even as they winged their way to the banyan tree. Even a short flight from one branch to another was accompanied by a characteristic cry which seemed to rise and fall in unison with their wing beats. It was not yet 5.00 a.m. and it was already dawn. This transition from the West coast to the East coast never failed to surprise me.

Soon after this, flocks of House Crows (Corvus splendens) and Jungle Crows (Corvus macrorhynchos) seemed to take over the whole tree. Over the tremendous din of these crows the higher pitched and penetrating cry of each individual Jungle Crow could be distinguished if one listened for it.

As I went about getting ready for the day, I was arrested by a clear musical whistle. I looked up to see a Hill Myna (Gracula religiosa) proudly holding up a banyan fig in its bill. This apparently stray flock of Hill Myas which I had been noticing on and off for many years seems to be dwindling in size. Now the Common Myas (Acridotheres tristis) arrived in their dozens and added to the general cacophony of sounds. So far no bird had fed on the banyan figs without frequently announcing to the world in general about the great feast laid out for them.

The first silent faders to arrive were the Crimson-breasted Barbets (Megalaima haemacephala) which flew in pairs from another banyan tree a hundred metres away. I saw at least eighteen birds arriving on the tree before they disappeared among the foliage. After that I could only get occasional glimpses of them picking the figs of their choice.

As the sun arose the lower branches of the tree were illuminated and the Jungle Crows dropped to the ground to pick up the fallen and very ripe figs. The general noise also became greatly subdued. Even some noisy Rose-ringed Parakeets (Psittacula krameri) which detached themselves from a flock flying high overhead and which dived down to the banyan were silent as they carefully ate partly raw figs. Undeterred by the fruit eaters a White-breasted Kingfisher (Halcyon smythensis) came crying to perch on the tip of one of the western branches and proclaimed to the world that it had arrived. Other insect eating birds to perch on the branches and sally out after flying prey were the Bee-eaters (Merops orientalis) and the Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis).

From the wide-spread leaf mulch and fallen fruit from this tree originated the next link in the food chain comprising of various worms and insects. Those which were a few centimetres below the surface were expertly probed and extracted by Hoopoes (Upupa epops) and those in the leaf mulch were searched out and gobbled up by White-headed Babblers (Turdoides affinis).

As the day went on, there was comparative quiet with well satisfied birds. In fact most birds except Jungle Crows went away to search for other varieties of food. Although there were so many fallen fruit Jungle Crows were found hiding some fruit here and there.



The afternoon silence was shattered by the thrilling cry of a pair of Golden-backed Wood-peckers (Dinopium benghalensis). These colourful birds searched every tree trunk most assiduously in their helical ascent.

The evening was again marked by a resumption of feeding activity before the birds flew off to their roosts.

Throughout the night on several occasions Spotted Owlets (Athene brama) called from this tree to their friends in surrounding trees. No birds were observed nesting in this particular banyan tree.

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#### EDITORIAL:

##### **The Need for a New Conservational Approach in India.**

The present measures for the preservation of wildlife in this country are totally inadequate and to my mind not in keeping with the context of the Indian scene. Within a few years we shall see that all our efforts have failed miserably.

The problem has assumed an immense scale and has to be tackled dynamically. In a democracy like ours mere legislation and Government Departments cannot succeed in something which is intrinsically mixed up with the lives of millions of peasants faced with poverty and problems of day to day existence. Only their fullest co-operation can result in the overall saving of our natural wealth.

The various Forest Departments have nothing to show other than gross mismanagement of the few forests which do exist and instead of increasing plant cover, in all parts of India there has been a depletion of vegetation. True, a few prestigious sanctuaries have been maintained, but apart from these precious little goes to their credit. The existing forests must be declared Reserve Forests, or at least a large portion of them, and these and the various Sanctuaries, wildlife, parks and National Parks should be placed under a special organisation on an all India level, while the forest department should be given the task of developing new forests, trees, farms, etc. on barren land, over-grazed and denuded hills and on ravine lands. Sylviculture, like agriculture, must be treated distinct from wildlife and wilderness promotion.



The fullest endeavour needs to be made whereby we tie our projects with water and soil conservation, hydel power and flood control. Programmes being worked out at various levels: village, district, state and national, should receive maximum publicity aimed at getting the goodwill and co-operation of the people.

Shikar laws need to be given a second thought and personalised arrangements in the form of vesting shooting and angling rights should be introduced on lines similar to those enjoyed in U.K. Local people should directly benefit from all shikar earnings.

The average Indian is very fond of animal life. It is part of his tradition and he must be exposed to the wealth of his natural heritage by full scale publicity on various mass media, options of cheap holidays among natural surroundings and subsidised travel facilities to various sanctuaries and wildernesses. Every child should be taken to the forests, sea, islands and mountains by subsidised school tours and deer parks should be set up around larger towns. It must be never forgotten that the Sarus and the Peafowl are still with us on account of public sentiments and not legislation.

K.S. Lavkumar.

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#### CORRESPONDENCE:

##### Bird Watching in Kosi Floods.

On the morning of 11th November, 1973 at 9.00 a.m. I visited by boat the inundated fields, the crop of which were devastated by floods of river Kosi which is called sorrow of North Bihar. As my boat proceeded slowly, a grand sight presented before me. A large flock of Ruddy Sheldrake was seen swimming. I estimated the number to be not less than 500. The birds arrived only a few days back. Widgeons, Shovellers, Common Teals, Pochards were also present in large numbers. Their clacking sound was heard from at least half a mile.

As my boat proceeded through submerged rice fields and came near the flock the birds became a bit nervous but I think they recognise a man with a gun because they allowed my boat to come nearer to their flock than any man with a gun. In the whole flock only one Grey-lag goose was seen. The bird looked very distinguished with its large size and reddish bill.

As I allowed my boat to come very near the birds, some of them became alert and gave warning signal and separate flocks of different species flew up and they settled down at some distance.

Brahminy Kites were flying and looking for food. Common gulls were also seen and they were quite aware that nobody will disturb them, because their flesh is palatable. Common and Whiskered Terns were seen and they swooped from the air on the water surface.

Godwits were seen wading in the water. Some stilts were also seen. Common Sandpipers, Little Stints and little ringed plovers were seen on edge of the water. A White Ibis was seen picking snails and was quite unmindful of our presence.

As the water teemed with large and small fishes, there was no dearth of large, lesser and small egrets. Cormorants were seen flying above but they never settled. As the sun was getting hotter, I returned at about 11.00 a.m.

Kameshwar Rd. Singh.

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# NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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GREY DRONGO (Dicrurus leucophaeus) IN BOMBAY AREA.

J.S. Serrao.

The first sightings of the Grey Drongo (Dicrurus leucophaeus) for 1974-75 winter were made separately by Dr. B. Das Gupta and myself on 25th October 1974 in the Salsette. The two birds observed had taken positions in thickly wooded compounds near our respective homes and were seen sallying after insects. 1973 arrival record appears to be the earliest for Bombay, when Mr. V.G. Govekar and myself observed it in the Borivli National Park on 14th October. But further south, Wolfe Murray reporting from the Nilgiris gave the arrival dates of the birds for three consecutive years in the Lovedale neighbourhood as: 15.x.1941, 17.x.1942 and 25.x.1943 (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 45: 90-91). No doubt then the Grey Drongo puts in its appearance in the Bombay area much earlier in certain years than hitherto recorded.

The history of the Grey Drongo in the Bombay area may be of interest to readers. During a short stay in Bombay on his voyage to the Laccadives and the West Coast, Allan Octavian Hume, a hundred years ago, found it to be the commonest bird at Elephanta, Trombay and 'Ooran' (Uran) in January 1875, and collected two females in the area (Stray Feathers 4: 415, footnote). Hume's record from Trombay however was seemingly overlooked by the Bombay and

Salsette Bird Survey, and discovery of the bird in our area was attributed to the late Mr. E. Henricks (an ex-staffer of the Bombay Natural History Society), who accidentally collected a specimen in Pandra on 22.x.1928, mistaking it for Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis). Since specimens have been collected in our area from Marol (Mr. Charles McCann, 4.xii.1934), Vihar (29.xi.1934) and Bassein (December 1934), the latter two by Mr. Humayun Abdulali.

The Grey Drongo is an aggressive little bird, and during the first few days of its arrival in our midst it is constantly seen at loggerheads with the Black Drongo wherever both chance to meet each other. Mr. Hymayun Abdulali informs me that the Grey on its arrival aggressively displaces the Black Drongo from the latter's forested territories and forces it into the open. The bird is also seen vociferously settling accounts with its own kin which intrude in the feeding territory it has established. In the field one never fails to notice its underparts which are duller and distinctive; the tail appears more widely and more deeply forked than the Black Drongo's; its ruby red iris distinguishes it, if otherwise in doubt. Capt. E.A. Butler noticed one in Belgaum on 27.xii.1879 devouring an Iora (Aegithina tiphia), holding the prey in its claws, and tearing it to pieces with the bill in hawk-like fashion, removing the feathers first. But Butler could not vouch the drongo having killed the iora (Stray Feathers 5: 500). Once settled in its winter quarters the bird assumes a very docile and friendly disposition. Often a birdwatcher intruding in the bird's beat is greeted by its querulous intonation che! che! where-u-going?, uttered perched on a branch a little way off in front of the birdwatcher. This it keeps up until the birdwatcher is out of its beat.

Writing of the bird in its home-range, Dr. Biswamoy Biswas records from Nepal having seen a first year male Grey Drongo (which he collected and dissected) on 18 June indulging in unusual aerobatics before three fledglings of a Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, huddled close together on a branch in 35° C morning temperature. The Grey would engage himself in upward flights, followed by sudden turns, uttering all the while a harsh call, and finally returning to the same branch on which the Racket-taileds were perched, or an adjacent one. Each flight was short and in full view of the tiny spectators. Amidst such aerobatics the Grey would engage himself from time to time in performing normal insect-hunting sallies. The whole manoeuvre of the Grey appeared inexplicable to the author; seemingly the bird was in a gay mood and was happily showing off all he knew about flying to the only spectators he could find, the three baby Racket-taileds (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 60:640).



## BRIEF NOTE ON SOME OBSERVATION AT LAHUL &amp; SPITI, H.P.

K.K. Mahajan & Rathin Mukherjee.

We are fortunate enough to travel in the high Himalayas in summer in the barren uplands of Lahul & Spiti, Himachal Pradesh for years together.

There are four routes to enter Lahul & Spiti of which two are by trekking from Pangi Valley of Dist. Chamba by crossing Sach Pass and from Kaurik-Samdu of Dist. Kinnour. The other two are to avail either side of Manali-Leh Road, which is claimed as the highest mountain road of the world. Among these the easy approachable route is from Manali, where the road passes through the famous Rhotang Pass (13050').

We started our expedition from Kaza of Spiti Valley, following the Spiti Nullah reached Losar via Rangrik. From Takcha we followed the river Chandra which is originating from Chandratol, a natural lake near Kunjam Pass (16000') and flowing towards west. We halted at Batul, Chotadhara, Chatru, Gramphu and Khoksar and entered Lahul Valley where we travelled along the course of the river.

We moved up to Patsoe, the last human habitation on this route in Lahul Valley, and came down following the river Bhaga, which ultimately unites with the river Chandra and flowing towards Pattan Valley as Chandra Bhaga or Chenab to Jammu.

Naturally we were excited to locate a solitary Grey Wagtail (Motacila cinerea), the first bird to recognise. The Hoopoe and Carian Crow were the only birds observed during the continuous journey for days in this area. We collected one Rufous-breasted Hedge Sparrow from the field adjacent to P.W.D. Rest House at Keylong along with a few Red-headed Grey Tits.

Emberiza cia stracheyi, strikingly marked little bunting flocks were observed on roadside plantations for soil conservation, and Potato fields on the vicinity of Kelong. Flock of Common Rose Finch (Caprodacus erythrinus roseatus) were observed in the compound of Keylong camp.

Black Redstart (Phaenicurus ochrurus) were found on the roadside, White-capped Redstart (Chaimarrhornis leucocephala) were the regular friends who met us whenever we go to nearby water sources.

We were interested to find out a good specimen of the Rufous-backed Shrike (Lanius schach) especially of race tephronotus which was found at Jespa onwards. June-August months appeared to be the breeding season of some birds in Lehul Valley such as the Chiff-chaff (Phylloscopus collybita sirdianus). Our thanks are due to K.L. Meheta, Game Warden, H.P. for providing us four Japanese Nylon Mist-nets.

\* \* \* \*

#### A CONVERSATION THROUGH THE NEWSLETTER CONTINUED.

K.S. Iavkumar.

I understand that a good conversationalist is the one who does the least talking and most listening. In such an event, this particular conversation, I am on the wrong side, though I do hope Mr. S.R. Shah would do a little more talking and when the Newsletter gets to Devonshire, Mr. Stairmand would send in a belated but rather loquacious rejoinder.

In the last issue, I had promised to say something more about choughs and a couple of other species mentioned by Mr. Shah. Both species of choughs are great masters of the art of flying, and for them the altitudinal range is certainly not much important since they can rapidly swoop down a valley to feed on a grassy meadow as low as 5,000' in the early morning and then as the ascending sun heats the air, use the thermals up the mountainside back to reach altitudes at over 12,000' or more. The Redbilled Chough has longer wings and is a more versatile flier and as such has a greater altitudinal range. Even so, both the Choughs are centered at 12,000' or more nesting in beetling crags often over glaciers and snowfields. Of the two the Yellowbilled Chough is however a bird of greater altitudes, having a higher lower range and a correspondingly higher upper range. Mountaineers' camps at great altitudes are more likely to be visited by the yellowbilled species. This I suspect is entirely on account of the differences in feeding habits. The bill structures of the two species clearly suggest a more catholic diet for the yellowbilled bird. The Redbilled Chough has a slender, long, slightly downcurved bill which is used for probing into soft turf and this species obviously feeds largely on grubs and insect larvae. The Yellowbilled Chough feeds on scraps left over from human campsites. At Vasudhara above Badrinath I have spent wonderful moments feeding a flock of Yellowbills on pellets of dough. The Redbills would often fly past, but they never came near or showed any interest in the feeding going on.



The mention of the Blacknaped Green Woodpecker by Mr. Shah needs clarification where I was concerned. I have been particularly bad at Green Woodpeckers in general and I am quite certain I cannot identify the various species with certainty even today. In fact, I find in the Synopsis four species of Green Woodpeckers. I would like to satisfy myself by seeing them all carefully. While I am on the subject of woodpeckers, I might mention having seen the Himalayan Great Slaty Woodpecker (Mullerpicus pulverulentus) in Simla whereas, it is said to be found west upto the UP Himalayas. Actually this is the only time I saw the bird and I watched it to my heart's content. Its large size, grey colour and very distinctive red moustachal stripes are etched clearly in my memory these so many years. The bird was feeding on ants at the base of an oak tree among mixed broadleaved forest of Rhododendron arboreum and oak. Actually, for the very large size of our country, very little field work has been done and there is no reason why species may not be found over larger areas. Similarly, we have noted the Blackfaced Flycatcher-Warbler in the Mandakini valley of western Garhwal while the Synopsis gives its range as Nepal east through Assam, etc. etc.

Coming to the matter of subspecies, the best example of how subspecies were first perpetuated, can be seen clearly in the case of the White Wagtail (Motacilla alba) and the Yellow Wagtail (M. flava). In the winter quarters in India we have six subspecies of the former and six subspecies of the latter. Each subspecies with a very distinctive colour pattern in full nuptial dress which in the original treatises, when specimens must have arrived from differing locations as vast as the landmass of Eurasia, must have appeared as very distinct species to be sorted out and related only later as more knowledge of the species over the entire vast range became clearer. The species then became relegated to the subspecific level. In fact, so very distinctive are the various races in these two species, that they can be told apart clearly in the field and for a layman, it becomes a matter of wonder why they are not different species in the first instance. In the same way, I might cite the example of the subspecies of the Gujarat Whitecheeked Bulbul (Pycnonotus leucogenys leucotis) and the Himalayan P.L. leucogenys. Nothing could be more dissimilar and earlier authors thought them to be two distinct species while now they are but two subspecies. Separate English names for such subspecific forms seem quite in order. And what of the two subspecies of the totally dissimilar Blackheaded Bulbuls (P. melanicterus flaviventris) of the Central and Eastern Himalayas and (P.m. gularis) of South Indian hills and plateaux? How have the taxonomists decided to lump them together as subspecies when for all obvious reasons they can be claimed as two separate species. This little discourse will show that the work of the taxonomists is quite beyond the ken of us laymen. Of course



for all the much vaunted claim of the reasonableness of scientists, these savants have been known to take every extreme position and good friends have fallen apart and attacked each other on account of stands taken in matters which later have proved both wrong! Its best that we keep out of such weighty arguments. To conclude, I am still awaiting clarifications for considering the Greenbacked Tit (Parus monticolus) a separate species though it resembles the Great Titmouse of Devon of Manali while the totally dissimilar Grey Tit (P. major stupae) of Junagadh is a subspecies of the British bird. Editor please help to clear this confusion.

\* \* \* \*

#### BIRDS SEEN IN JHALAWAR DURING 21ST TO 28TH FEBRUARY 1974.

N.K. Bajpai.

I approached the pond Godown-ki-Talai one evening with my son, nephew and niece which was our party throughout my stay at Jhalawar. We found 4 White Wagtails approaching to receive us and then getting away perching and wagging their tails.

Godown-ki-Talai had Cattle Egret, Paddy bird, Blackwinged Stilt associated with Common Sandpiper and Little Stint. The Paddy bird is nearly always seen in any pond whatever the situation of the pond may be though it is not found in abundant numbers.

Apparently Little Stint seems to be miniature Sandpiper. More than once I could find two stints fighting like trained partridges. Tituri were found singly and in pairs at several banks. Lots of Blue Rock Pigeons were also seen near water. A Pied Kingfisher, flying over water keeping itself stationary for about a minute or so at about 10 metre height and then diving into the water and emerging with a fish, was also seen. These were the only birds seen near Godam-ki-Talai.

In my garden when I was with my party for most of the mornings and evenings I found several birds on my flowering pomegranate tree. A tailor bird coming quietly and searching among the foliage and occasionally hiding was seen. By coming closer to the tree I concluded that the bird was a White-eye and not the Tailor bird. Normally it appeared alone but sometimes in a pair, but once I found a flock of about 10 birds. The Purple Sunbird was seen at about 50 metres while it suddenly flew towards the pomegranate tree and sucking the nectar of flowers while inverting itself. Its deep violet colour and red colour of the flower contrasted beautifully giving a pleasant view to the watchers from only about 5 metres.

House Sparrows, Redvented Bulbul, House Myna, Brahminy Myna, Common Babblers, Parakeets were the other visitors to my pomegranate tree.

One fine afternoon when I was with my son for birdwatching, I found one Shikra fighting with a Pariah Kite. The pariah kite flew on unperturbed and reacted only when the shikra approached very close to it in the course of the attack from above. None were harmed at all though this exciting display was for about 15 minutes. The Shikra after spotting a prey left the Kite and followed its quarry shiftily. In the nearby forest we found Collared Bushchats - males and females both. Males fly upto about 15 metres from the ground and then descend vertically like loose stones quickly reopen their wings and take a turn just above the ground. Pied Bushchats were also seen.

One bird sitting on a branch of a neem tree was found undisturbed when watched for about half an hour. It was of the size of a bulbul and greyish black like an Indian Robin. Minute observations suggested that the portion above neck was dull yellow, the tail was squared and dark brown while the rest of the body was spotted everywhere except for its neck and tail. From its bill and other characters it should be some Thrush. Editor may suggest the name of the bird to oblige me.

Other birds seen during the last week of February may be listed as :-

Black Drongo	Hoopoe	Indian Robin
Indian Pipit	Bluetailed Bee-eater.	Spotted Dove
Grey Partridge	Tree Pie	Grey Tit

Watch the birds and you are likely to see a new bird everyday. Birds which have got pleasant structures, colours, calls seem to be very happy in Jhalawar (Rajasthan) liking the semi-desert conditions.

Children find the Grey Wagtail much more beautiful than the White Wagtail. It is recognised by its pleasant yellow colour but yet it is called grey wagtail and not the yellow wagtail.

Due to some assignment I left my party at one place and on my way to Khandiya Talab I found a Magpie Robin with a wonderful flight. To my surprise the party members told me how they also found Magpie Robin on their way the same day.



I promised to show a Kingfisher to my son on a particular date and time and I did it. I got much satisfaction in showing a Whitebreasted Kingfisher sitting on a branch of a neem tree eating some type of snail. Rufousbacked Shrike, Yellowbacked Sunbird and Goldmantled Chloropsis were among the pretty birds seen at Jhalawar but nothing more beautiful than an Indian Courser. My brother was riding the motor cycle and we were being no more interested in birdwatching being late and riding through a kachha road but we had to stop when the courser was walking like a Redwattled Lapwing in the field. I was really sorry for not having the camera that time.

While returning from Jhalawar during my 3 weeks' stay I was watching the birds from the window of the bus and feeling as if I was leaving for a barren place where there would be no more birds. My last sight was of Cormorants flying and getting farther and farther away.

\* \* \* \*

#### EDITORIAL:

The most favourable bird watching season is now here. Although the maximum nest building and breeding activity of local birds coincides with the monsoon, the birdwatcher is physically hampered by the weather. Moreover, an abundance of foliage and undergrowth prevents the sighting of birds which have become doubly cautious during the nesting period.

All this is changed now. Vast areas can be scanned at once by naked eye or field glasses and with rewarding results. Flocks of winter visitors free from domestic cares can be seen feeding unconcernedly in the sunshine.

\*\*\* \*\*

There was a peculiar news item in the papers to the effect that although the Hungarian Prime Minister (Jeno Fock) and his aides were on a visit to this country, the usual bird migrants from Hungary had all gone to Egypt instead of coming here.

It is quite logical that the great majority of birds from Hungary go due South to the African continent provided the feeding conditions are suitable at their winter quarters. It is however quite another matter to state, without making ringing and recovery operations, that birds which traditionally migrate to India have gone to Egypt.

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## CORRESPONDENCE:

## A Queer Display of the Tailor Bird.

On the 16th or 17th of August, in the afternoon at about 1.30 p.m. or so, I heard some persistent twittering of a Tailor Bird (Orthotomus sutorius). On going out to investigate, I saw perched on a branch of a mango tree in front of our house, what appeared to be a male. (It had an orangeish cap on the head). I might mention here that my flat is a terrace flat. By standing on the terrace the bird was viewed at eye-level. Anyway, to continue - he was fluttering at great speed without moving much and throwing back his head, he twittered all the while almost without a pause. The female was on the opposite branch also fluttering her wings but was not at all vocal. The male now started a slow hopping advance towards the end of the branch. As he came to a position almost opposite the female, he suddenly rose upright into the air, in a vertical stance all the while fluttering his wings. He seemed to be hanging in midair for a second, then he slowly moved towards the female on rapidly vibrating wings, keeping up his twittering and his vertical position all the while. As he neared her, the female took off and the pair dived downwards out of view. An interested spectator, apart from myself, was a male Purple Sunbird! He had been perched on a branch just above the courting pair, and so engrossed was he in their courtship that he did not fly off when I came to stand near the parapet of the terrace. It was only when the others flew off that he too decided to leave! The whole display took about 2 or 3 minutes.

(Miss) Urmilla Chatterjee.

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